

Li Tang, Dietmar W. Winkler (Eds.)

# Silk Road Traces

Studies on Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia



orientalia – patristica – oecumenica vol. 21

LIT

Li Tang,  
Dietmar W. Winkler (eds.)

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# orientalia – patristica – oecumenica

herausgegeben von/edited by

**Dietmar W. Winkler**

(Universität Salzburg)

Vol. 21

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Li Tang and Dietmar W. Winkler

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Photo: Gravestone, Usharal-Ilibalyk/Kazakhstan, 17 × 28 × 95 cm,  
discovered 2014 (courtesy of: Archaeological Expertise LLP, Almaty)

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## PREFACE

The Salzburg International Conference series on Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia has been running for almost two decades. Beginning in 2003 in Salzburg, it takes place in normal circumstances every three years in Salzburg. However, the conference of 2019 was a special occasion, as it took place in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Given all the recent exciting archaeological discoveries of medieval Syriac Christianity in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, we, the organisers of the conference decided to hold our 6<sup>th</sup> triennial conference in Kazakhstan in Central Asia, thus bringing scholars and scholarly discussions closer to both the archaeological sites and the artefacts *in situ*.

Such an adventurous plan would not have been successfully executed without the cooperation of our collaborators from Central Asia, especially Kazakhstan to whom our big thanks are due. Among them, the names of two colleagues who played an important role in co-planning the conference and facilitating its sections are particularly worth mentioning: Kevin White, head of the Department of Nestorian Studies, Kazakhstan Archaeological Institute of Kazakhstan Academy of Sciences and Dr. Dmitriy Voyakin, director of the International Institute for Central Asian Studies in Samarkand by the UNESCO Silk Road Programme.

From June 20 to 26, 2019, about fifty people from academic institutions in the Asia-Pacific, Europe, North America participated in the 6<sup>th</sup> Salzburg International Conference on Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia. What is more, as a noteworthy addition to the conference, scholars from Central Asia, especially, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan joined us and presented their papers during the conference. A total of thirty-five papers covering a wide range of topics related to Syriac Christianity were presented at the conference. The participants also benefited from a field trip to the newly excavated site of a medieval Christian cemetery in Usharal (Ilibalyk) near Zharkent, Kazakhstan.

The current volume is a collection of the revised papers which were originally presented at the Almaty conference in 2019. The papers can be divided into four areas of research focus: archaeological discovery, textual studies, historical perspective and theological reflection. Recent archaeological excavations of medieval Christian sites in Central Asia and China have come to the forefront of our attention. Two newly excavated sites have yielded some exciting results recently: the Syriac Christian cemetery in Usharal in Eastern Kazakhstan and the



monastery ruin in Bulayïg, Turfan, China. More detailed archaeological reports on both sites are expected. Meanwhile, as usual, scholars in this field have also conducted their research on other topics, such as, unearthed manuscripts related to Syriac Christianity, reflections on the history of Syriac Christian mission in Central Asia and China as well as the formation of theological thinking reflected in the written texts. The volume includes cutting-edge researches in various aspects of Syriac Christianity in China, Central Asia and along the Silk Road thanks to new archaeological discoveries and the recent excavations which have cast new light on the dissemination of medieval Syriac Christianity and its influence on communities along the Silk Road.

Upon releasing the current volume of newly edited research papers, we would like to render our heartfelt thanks specially to Dr. Victor Baillou of Salzburg and Prof. Mag. Mag. Dr. Martin Lang of Institut für Alte Geschichte und Altorientalistik of the University of Innsbruck for their generous support in various ways. Last but not least, we extend our gratitude also to the Land Salzburg, Referat für Kultur und Wissenschaft for their timely support and generous backing of our research project.

We hope that this volume will benefit not only the academic community worldwide but also those who are interested in the studies of Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia.

Li Tang & Dietmar W. Winkler  
Salzburg, at the University of Salzburg

# SYRIAC CHRISTIAN MONASTERY IN SHÜIPANG, TURFAN: NOTES ON THE RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT FROM CHINA

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University of Salzburg, Austria

Ruins of a medieval Syriac Christian monastery in Shüipang 西旁 (شوي پانگ) near Turfan (تورپان) in Xinjiang, China have been recently excavated by a joint archaeological team from Xinjiang Turpan Academy, Xinjiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and School of Sociology and Anthropology of the Sun Yat-Sen University.<sup>1</sup> An excavation report (in Chinese) for the year 2021 has just appeared in the journal of *Xiyu Yanjiu* 西域研究 no.1, (January, 2022),<sup>2</sup> accompanied by a video release showing a dramatic visual record and aerial photographs of the ruins.<sup>3</sup> The present paper seeks to present the main content of their initial findings to those who do not read Chinese and give a preliminary commentary on the archaeological data.<sup>4</sup>

## I. Introduction

### 1.1. The Site

Site Name: 西旁景教寺院遗址

Site of Jingjiao Monastery in Xipang/Shüipang<sup>5</sup>

Coordinates: long. 89°12'55.39" E; lat. 42°59'23.76" N

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<sup>1</sup> Chinese names: 新疆吐鲁番研究院, 新疆文物考古所及中山大学社会学与人类学学院.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. LIU Wenshuo 刘文锁, WANG Zexiang 王泽祥 & WANG Long 王龙, "Xinjiang Tulufan Xipang Jingjiao Yizhi: 2021nian kaogu fanjue de zhuyao shouhuo yu chubu renshi 新疆吐鲁番西旁景教遗址: 2021 年考古发掘的主要收获与初步认识" in *Xiyu Yanjiu* 西域研究, No. 1 (Jan. 2022): 74-80.

<sup>3</sup> The video shows three other fragments and broken frescoes in situ together with a ruler to demonstrate the size. However, the size the fragment and artefacts in the archaeological report is not given. See the link (retrieved 1.1.2022):

[https://t.cnki.net/kcms/detail?v=P7vMvggqYY1AvhQTscA6pQgic0OOD8DIRheIbaLwALoNra8jyZVLMzzSych6rW6rw60s8Y0LQdSkCtE3PFjZQ\\_sclD3ylhbNTdzrtOuo\\_WyWQ5Wr4QRHxpgwEuXR\\_svtb9XPKkHeNCINw8EE2-77WiNCBawAZIH](https://t.cnki.net/kcms/detail?v=P7vMvggqYY1AvhQTscA6pQgic0OOD8DIRheIbaLwALoNra8jyZVLMzzSych6rW6rw60s8Y0LQdSkCtE3PFjZQ_sclD3ylhbNTdzrtOuo_WyWQ5Wr4QRHxpgwEuXR_svtb9XPKkHeNCINw8EE2-77WiNCBawAZIH)

<sup>4</sup> My acknowledgements and thanks are extended to Zhang Xiaogui, Lin Wushu, Z. Aydin, J.F. Coakley and D.J. Ibbetson.

<sup>5</sup> Xipang (Chinese *Pinyin*) = Shüipang (English transcription) = Schüipang (German transcription). All are phonetic transcriptions. In English publications, Shüipang is normally used. In this article, the three are used interchangeably according to context.

Situated between Bulayig<sup>6</sup> (بولايىق / 葡萄沟 / بۇيلۇق – *Uig.*) in the east, Tao'ergou 桃儿沟 in the west, and 10km to the north of Turfan, the Xipang ruins stand on top of a 20m high natural mound. The site consists of surviving remains of an adobe complex. Roofless buildings with fragmented walls make up the abandoned site. Surface survey reveals that the ruin on top of the mound measures 50m (NS) by 40m (EW).<sup>7</sup> There are also buildings on the northern and eastern slopes of the mound. A narrow mountain ridge runs eastwards from the southern slope of the mound to the foot of the Flaming Mountain (Huoyan Shan 火焰山) in the east.

In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both German and Russian<sup>8</sup> expedition teams set foot on Xipang, which they called Shüipang. However, it has not been on the Chinese excavation agenda until recently due to the fact that the location and description of the find-spot in the German expedition report were so undetailed that identifying the spot has proved difficult. During previous Chinese nationwide cultural relics surveys before 2007, the ruin in Xipang was regarded as an “abandoned dwelling” because of its nondescript nature.<sup>9</sup> In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, von le Coq's reports began to attract the attention of Chinese archaeologists and historians. During the third Chinese nationwide cultural relics survey from 2007 to 2011, Xipang ruin was rediscovered. An official archaeological excavation followed soon after, carried out by a joint team of Xinjiang Turpan Academy, Xinjiang Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology and School of Sociology and Anthropology of the Sun Yat-Sen University. Before they could excavate the ancient ruin, they first found *in situ* 19<sup>th</sup> century match boxes with Russian text printed on them, fragments of Hungarian newspaper and books, cigarette ends, Japanese pencils made between 1911-1949, dug holes and soil of the cultural layer – traces of previous diggers, explorers and adventurers and signs that the place has been dug up, disturbed and repeatedly looted since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.2. New Findings (2021)

The archaeological report devotes 3 pages to the detail of the findings, especially the site itself. The following is an introduction to these findings summarised in bullet points.<sup>11</sup> According to the report, the excavation of the year 2021 covered an area of 475m<sup>2</sup> of the ruin. The team was able to collect data on the stratigraphic layers with their respective (and different) soil, structure and unearthed artefacts.

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<sup>6</sup> von le Coq's transcription.

<sup>7</sup> Archaeological recording is found in LIU, ET AL 2022, 74.

<sup>8</sup> Russian team also explored Turfan. Report by S.F. Oldenburg in Russian on Russian Turkistan expedition, 1909-1910, published in 1914.

<sup>9</sup> Report by Xinhuanet (retrieved 4.1.2022): [http://www.xjass.cn/lis/content/2008-12/13/content\\_45982.htm](http://www.xjass.cn/lis/content/2008-12/13/content_45982.htm)

<sup>10</sup> LIU, ET AL 2022, 75-76.

<sup>11</sup> The description of the finds, see LIU ET AL 2022, 76-79.

The excavated site as shown in the copy of the orthophoto (fig. 1<sup>12</sup>) consists of 13 rooms (F1-13), 2 aisles (TD1-TD2), 2 platforms (PT1-PT2), 4 sections of unidentifiable walls (Q1-Q4), and one ground site (DM1). The layout shows 3 rows (clusters) of buildings lying parallelly from north to south. To the west of these buildings, there is another cluster of buildings which consists of 1 platform, 2 rooms with their adjacent buildings and one slope protection.<sup>13</sup> Each part of buildings has shown signs of structural re-building and adding more part to the original building at different phases in history, thus causing overlaps. Later re-building used the old broken frescoes for re-laying of the flooring. Buildings of the earlier phase were of adobe construction. In the later phase, apart from adobe masonry, the outer walls were also constructed with pile mud mixed with gravel (which was the original makeup of the mound) and clay.

### Layout of the Ruin:

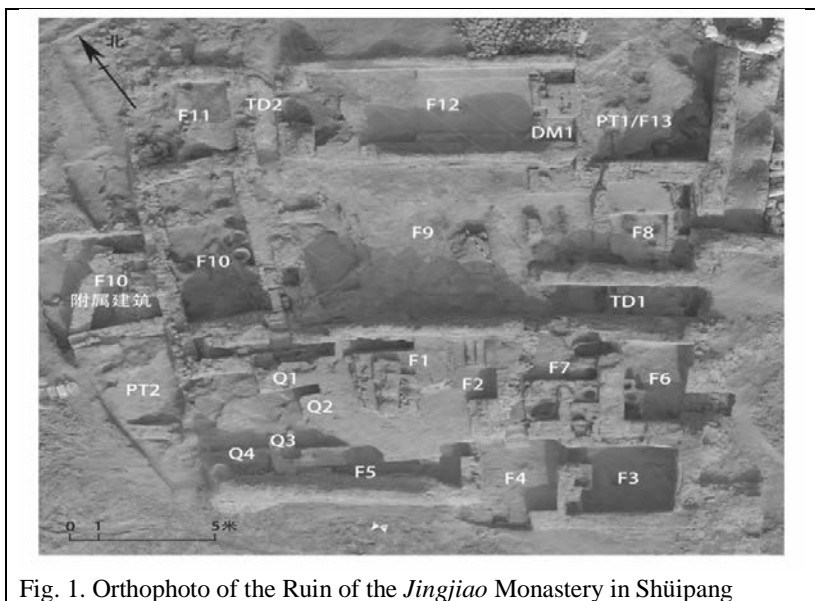


Fig. 1. Orthophoto of the Ruin of the *Jingjiao* Monastery in Shüipang

Cluster 1: This cluster lies in the southern part of the ruin. Seven rooms (F1-F7) and four sections of broken wall (Q1-Q4).

- F1 was rebuilt using the fallen wall sections of F2.
- F2, F9 and F12 were used combinedly in the same phase. The eastern wall of F2 has a shrine/niche structure built in.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 76, image 2, taken in 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 76.

- F3 is a room with a square dome structure. The walls in F3 contain facilities for niche and fireplace. Some written fragments and remnants.
- F5 consists of partial broken walls and doors, built earlier than F2.
- F6 has an earthen platform and facilities for fire lighting. It could be a dwelling.
- F7 is of a square shape connected to F3-F5 through steps
- Q1-Q4 seem to be the remains of the earliest construction phase.

Cluster 2 (the middle cluster): It includes 2 rooms (F8 & F9) and 1 aisle (TD1)

- F8 is the remain of a L-shaped earth pit, re-built on the previous construction. Some written fragments and other remains have been found here.
- F9 is a hall of rectangular shape. It could be a middle temple or hall. But it was renovated in the later phase and has been badly looted. Many written fragments, broken pottery pieces with inscriptions and a small number of fragmentary frescoes have been found here.

Cluster 3: This cluster lies in the northern part of the ruin. It has 2 rooms (F12 & F13), 1 platform (PT1) and 1 aisle (TD2).

- F12 is a hall with earthen sitting platforms. The eastern wall has a built-in niche. A remain of a broken wood cross has been found near the niche. Beneath F12 lies a layer of blue bricks.
- F13 appears to be a kitchen area with some grain remains found. However, it was re-built in the later phase into a platform using some broken frescos and other building remains of an earlier phase. The archaeologists think that the platform may be used for religious rituals.<sup>14</sup>

Cluster 4: This cluster of buildings lies to the west of the ruin and on top of the mound. It consists of 1 platform (PT2), 2 rooms (F10 and the rooms attached to F10, F11).

- F10 and its attached buildings were used in two different phases in history. It was in the earlier period a room with a trapezoid shape with steps leading to a platform outside and a toilet. The earlier construction had two storeys. 7 huge pottery urns with dark red remains have been found. They were probably wine containers.
- F11 is a room north of F10 which has been badly damaged.

### Material Remains

According to the report, the excavation has yielded numerous artefacts of a wide diversity. There were 1,041 small artefacts, among them are 497 written documents, 186 pieces of fragmented frescoes, 12 pieces of earthenware, 16 coins, 161 pieces of wooden articles, 58 non-paper writing materials, 6 bone tools, 23 metal tools, 53 leather fabrics as well 29 pieces of other kinds of artefacts such

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<sup>14</sup> LIU, ET AL 2022, 78.

as lacquerware, stoneware, glassware, pottery pieces and gourd slices with inscribed text, etc. There are also other unlabelled relics.<sup>15</sup>

### Manuscripts

All documents were written on paper in various languages. Apart from a small number of Chinese documents, the majority of the documents were written in non-Chinese languages, such as Syriac, Old Uighur and others (not specified in the archaeological report).<sup>16</sup> F10 has unearthed a piece of folio made of high-quality paper with Syriac writing on it (fig.5).<sup>17</sup> The measurement of the paper is not provided in the report, but it is a page from a book. The western wall of F10 near the toilet area a portfolio or album wrapped in cloth was found, which contains some Syriac fragments, fragment of the Chinese Buddhist text 佛說佛名經 [Sutra of the Buddha Proclaiming the Names of Buddhas] and fragments with scribbled Chinese writing, as well as some bilingual writings (language not specified in the report). Given the fact that manuscripts belonging to the Church of the East were excavated from the ruin in Shüipang before, the Chinese archaeologists believed the current unearthed fragments in Syriac and other languages should also be related to the East Syriac Church.<sup>18</sup>

### Frescoes

A large number of fragmented frescoes have survived with various mural contents such as portraits, plants, ornamentation, light or Buddha's body light (Fig. 2<sup>19</sup>). Some of the frescoes contain Syriac or Old Uighur inscriptions.<sup>20</sup> Gold leaf was applied to some fresco paintings. A female portrait displays a Tang-period painting style. Some of the painting techniques, especially the use of green and blue colour, resemble the techniques used for the fresco paintings in the Bezeklik and Toyok Thousand Buddha Caves in Turfan, which belong to the period of the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries). Another painted male portrait of a possible religious figure, resembles the murals from the monastery ruin of Qocho in Turfan.<sup>21</sup> A figure painting on a polygonal pillar with Old Uighur writing on it is similar to those Buddhist



Fig. 2

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> The archaeological report publishes only one Syriac text (fig. 5), but in the released video, two other fragments in Syriac script were shown but not Fig.5.

<sup>17</sup> LIU, ET AL 2022, 79.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 79, fig. 2. Unearthed fresco.

<sup>20</sup> No images are provided.

<sup>21</sup> This may refer to the Palm-Sunday mural from Qocho discovered by A. von Le Coq during the second German Turfan-Expedition. The fresco is now kept in Museum für Asiatische Kunst in Berlin's Humboldt Forum.

benefactors portrayed in contemporary Buddhist paintings. However, the images of these frescoes are not provided in the archaeological report.

### 1.3. Preliminary Understanding by the Chinese Archaeologists

After consulting the findings and writings of Albert von le Coq and others and comparing with Syriac Christian monastery ruins in the Middle East and Central Asia, the current excavation began with a well-grounded prior knowledge that the site was a Christian (*jingjiao*) monastery adherent to the Church of the East. The archaeological report of the year 2021 has come to the following conclusion summarised below:<sup>22</sup>

First, the ruin has a three-phase of use (in history):

**Phase 1:** the lowest layer of F3-F6, F7; earlier walls and ground of F10.

After analysing the structure layout and the unearthed artefacts, the team members believed that the first two phases both have the characteristics of a Syriac Christian (*jingjiao*) monastery. They conclude that the first phase belongs to the Tang period (7<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century) when the establishment was built. This view is supported by the unearthed wooden cup with bead pattern design that resembles the woodware of the Tang period discovered in the Astana tomb in Turfan and the Tang-style fragmented frescos.<sup>23</sup>

**Phase 2:** later walls and ground of F2, F9, F12, PT1, F10

The second phase is in the Qocho Uighur period (9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century), as coins from the parallel Song Dynasty (10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> century) in China proper, contemporary lacquerware and murals with painted Uighur figures as well as Old Uighur manuscripts have been unearthed.<sup>24</sup>

**Phase 3:** later remains from F1 & F9

There are fewer remains and shallower deposits for this phase. The original monastery layout has been completely destroyed. Later facilities such as feeding troughs for raising livestock can be seen, which means the purpose of the building changed during this phase. There are also ca. 10 coins from the Qing dynasty (1636-1912), which have been unearthed. Therefore, the archaeologists believed that the third phase should correspond to the Qing Dynasty.<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, the Shüipang ruin was once a complete functional *Jingjiao* Monastery. The team believed that the Shüipang ruin was a complete functional Christian monastery, as there are places for performing religious rituals, a kitchen, a wine cellar, sleeping rooms as well as other living facilities. The layout of the three-row clusters of buildings standing from north to south bears the characteristics of

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<sup>22</sup> The conclusion is summaries on LIU, ET AL 2022, 80

<sup>23</sup> LIU, ET AL 2022, 80.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

a ‘triple nave church’ seen among monasteries in West and Central Asia, but in terms of mural style, painting techniques and the use of paint, there is an obvious connection between the Shüipang monastery and Bezeklik and Toyog caves as well as the ‘K’ monastery (Manichean) in Qocho of the period of the Qocho Uighur Kingdom. Syriac Christianity not only maintained its traditional architectural norms but also became contextualised in medieval Turfan.

Thirdly, all the remains from the site reveal that the monastery had gone through stages of operation, re-construction and abandonment. Future excavation of the site will involve a clean-up of the mound slope and a survey of the surrounding area. A radiocarbon dating (carbon 14 dating) will be carried out in order to analyse the different operational stages of the monastery as well as the stratigraphic sequence.

## II. Commentary

### 1. The Second German Expeditions

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, based on the palpable results of previous European explorations of Chinese Turkestan, especially motivated by the adventures of Dmitrii Klementz (Russia, 1847-1914) and Mark Aurel Stein (British India, 1862-1943),<sup>26</sup> the German expedition team was formed, led by Prof. Albert Grünwedel (1856-1935) and Albert von Le Coq (1860-1930). They conducted four expeditions in Chinese Turkestan from 1902-1914 and acquired through excavation thousands of paintings, art objects and manuscripts now kept in museums and libraries in Berlin. In 1905 when the second German expedition led by Albert von le Coq explored the oasis of Turfan, von Le Coq sent his technical assistant Theodor Bartus (1858-1941) to do some digging in ‘the little ruin of Schüipang’. But this seemingly random digging yielded an unexpected harvest of medieval Christian manuscripts from the horribly ruined walls. A decade later, when von le Coq published the outcomes of the digging in Shüipang in his monograph *Auf Hellas Spuren in Ostturkistan* (1926),<sup>27</sup> he was still caught up in his post-expedition euphoria of their fabulous yield (“fabelhafte Ausbeute”), i.e., numerous Christian manuscripts in various less known languages and scripts, e.g., Middle Persian (Pahlavi), Sogdian, Syriac and Old Turkic.

In 1919, von le Coq published the facsimiles of his Turfan photographs, including also a facsimile of Shüipang (fig.3) accompanied by a caption (fig. 4) indicating that the ruin was the place where Christian texts in Middle Persian, Sogdian, Syriac and Turkic were found.<sup>28</sup> In another article published in English in 1909,

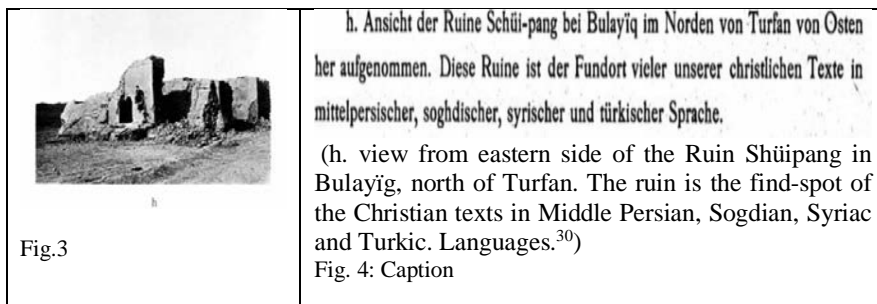
<sup>26</sup> D. Klementz explored Turfan in 1898 and brought many artefacts and manuscripts back to Russia. Mark Aurel Stein explored in Southern Xinjiang. See VON LE COQ 1919, 300.

<sup>27</sup> In this volume, Albert von le Coq recorded the second and the third German expeditions in Turfan.

<sup>28</sup> VON LE COQ 1919, 70 (facsimile), 71 (Caption).



von le Coq stated that the ruin was once “a Christian settlement, for all the MSS. discovered there are Christian. A line of Greek writing, on the margin of an [*sic*] Uighur fragment, was read and dated by U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, who assigned it to the ninth century.”<sup>29</sup>



Among the Christian manuscripts and fragments discovered during the second German Turfan expedition mentioned by von le Coq in 1926, are<sup>31</sup>:

- A complete Psalter in archaic Pahlavi cursive script (inscriptional script as compared to the script on Sassanian coins), consisting of 12 damaged pages (11x9.6 cm), dated by F.C. Andreas to 410-420 AD.<sup>32</sup>
- Middle-Turkic translation of St. George Legend
- A Christian apocrypha text concerning the visit of baby Jesus by the three wise men
- Fragments of the Nicene Creed
- Parts of Matthew’s Gospel
- Legend of the discovery of Holy Cross through Queen Helena
- Other Christian texts

## 2. Cataloguing the Christian MSS

The German Turfan expeditions of a century ago yielded a bumper harvest of thousands of cultural and religious items, murals, manuscripts and others artefacts from medieval Turfan. The largest category in this collection is the written texts. All the artefacts including about 40,000 fragments in more than 20 different languages and scripts were brought to Berlin.<sup>33</sup> In recent years, most of the fragments, especially Christian fragments have been catalogued together with

<sup>29</sup> VON LE COQ 1909, 321.

<sup>30</sup> VON LE COQ 1913, 70 (facsimile ‘h’), 71 (caption for ‘h’). Cf. Von le Coq 1926, 88.

<sup>31</sup> VON LE COQ 1926, 88.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. F.C. ANDREAS, “Bruchstück einer Pehlevi-Übersetzung der Psalmen aus der Sassanidenzeit“ in *Sitzungsberichte der Königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*. 2nd Band, (July-December, 1910): 870.

<sup>33</sup> *TURFAN STUDIES* 2007, 5.

translations. Erica C.D. Hunter and Mark Dickens catalogued the Syriac fragments from Turfan, which von le Coq brought back to Berlin from 1902 to 1914, but especially from his second and third expeditions (1904-1907),<sup>34</sup> including those from Bulayig together with an English translation. They catalogued 481 single-folios and some bifolios fragments, even though it is still a small part of the whole Turfan collection. Most of them are from Shüipang, the monastery ruins, the rest is excavated from Astana, Qocho, Toyok and Kurukta in the Turfan area. Manuscripts in Iranian languages such as Sogdian and New Persian but in Syriac script have been studied and catalogued by Nicholas Sims-Williams,<sup>35</sup> whereas Old Uighur Christian texts have been studied by Peter Zieme.<sup>36</sup> All the Syriac fragments have been digitised and are accessible via the International Dunhuang Project (IDP) website ([www.idp.bl.uk](http://www.idp.bl.uk)).

The manuscripts discovered by the Chinese archaeologists during their excavation of Xipang in 2021 are yet to be catalogued, studied and published. We are told that there are 474 of them with the majority written in Syriac, Old Uighur and other non-Chinese languages and script. In the archaeological report of 2021, only one photo of Syriac fragment (fig. 5) has been published side by side with a few other artefacts including a broken wooden cross. But the released video flashes three other fragments in Syriac script, which are not published or listed in the archaeological report.

#### Syriac Fragment (Fig. 5)

The fragment *per se* has 10 rows of legible Syriac writing, appearing to be written in a mixture of the Eastern (“Nestorian”), Estrangelā and Serto scripts on high quality paper. It was unearthed in the F3 section as illustrated in Fig.1. Unfortunately, at this stage, the codicological information regarding the folio is still lacking.

The size of the fragment is not provided in the excavation report. Judging from the number of Syriac words in one row, which goes from two to three words, it can be assumed easily that the paper is of pocket book size. The folio shows it is the left-hand side of the page, but regarded as the *recto* for MSS written from right to left. The bottom left corner is missing.

The text is reproduced and translated into English by the current author as follows:<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> HUNTER & DICKENS 2014, ii. My thanks are extended to Erica C.D. Hunter for sending me the book.

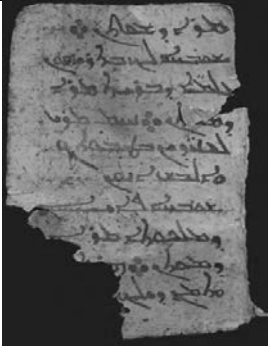
<sup>35</sup> SEE SIMS-WILLIAMS 2012

<sup>36</sup> See ZIEME 2015.

<sup>37</sup> A preliminary English translation of the Syriac text by Li TANG.

*\*Apparatus:*

- [...]: inside the square brackets is the missing text but reconstructed by the current author.
- ʔ: question mark indicated that the reconstructed Syriac text in the square brackets is pending.

Fascimile of the Original	Reproduced Text
 <p>Fig. 5. Syriac MS</p>	<p>* ܕܡܘܬܢ ܡܪ (1)</p> <p>ܠܡܘܬܢ ܠܟ ܒܬܪܝܗܘܢ (2)</p> <p>ܠܡܘܬܢ ܕܒܪܝܬ ܡܪ (3)</p> <p>ܕܡܘܬܢ ܕܡܪܝܡ (4)</p> <p>ܠܢܝܘܢ ܕܡܘܬܢ (5)</p> <p>ܡܠܟܘܬܐ (6)</p> <p>ܡܠܟܘܬܐ (7)</p> <p>ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܡܪܝܡ (8)</p> <p>[ܡܠܟܘܬܐ] * ܕܡܘܬܢ (9)</p> <p>[ʔܡܠܟܘܬܐ] ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܡܪܝܡ (10)</p>

Transliteration	Translation
<p>1. mr' dmwtn</p> <p>2. šwh' lk btryhwn</p> <p>3. 'lm' dbryt mr'</p> <p>4. dmwtn. hm mry</p> <p>5. l'nydyn btybwtk</p> <p>6. w'lbš 'nwn</p> <p>7. šwbh' p'y'</p> <p>8. dmlkw' mr'</p> <p>9. dmwtn. h[rk']</p> <p>10. wtmn dylk [anwn?]</p>	<p>1. Lord of our death<sup>38</sup></p> <p>2. Praise (be) unto you in the two</p> <p>3. worlds which you have created.<sup>39</sup> Lord</p> <p>4. of our death. My Lord, raise up</p> <p>5. the departed with your grace</p> <p>6. and clothe them</p> <p>7. (with) goodly glory</p> <p>8. of the kingdom. Lord</p> <p>9. of our death. H[ere]</p> <p>10. and there yours [they are]</p>

Its content resembles a liturgical prayer for the deceased clergy in the Order for the Burial of the Priests. The Order gives the instruction that “On the death of

<sup>38</sup> In the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, J.P. Badger collected many Syriac liturgical contents from “Nestorians” and Chaldeans in Mesopotamia and translated them into English. The content of this Syriac folio from Xipang resembles very much the prayers in the funeral liturgy in Badger’s

one of the Church they shall wash him and put on his clothe and shall say over him this first Moutwa, †[or Cathisma] of the washing when the corpse is laid out”.<sup>40</sup>

A comparison of F3 Syriac fragment with the funeral liturgy for the clergy:

<b>F3 Syriac Fragment</b>	<b>Funeral liturgy</b>
Lord of our death (line 1, 3-4)	“Lord of our death and life”. <sup>41</sup>
Praise unto you in the two worlds which you have created (line 2-3)	“Unto Thee we give thanks, worship and praise in the two worlds which you have created.” <sup>42</sup>
Raise up the departed with your grace and clothe them with goodly glory of the kingdom (line 4-8)	“Raise up our dead, O Lord, and make them to stand at thy right hand, and clothe them with a goodly glory in thy kingdom...” <sup>43</sup>

A comparison of later versions of the Order for the burial of the priests from the Church of the East in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Mesopotamia and of present day clearly shows that there is a consistence in the tradition of the Church of the East in medieval west China and Mesopotamia, as the content of the Syriac fragment from Shüipang, Turfan shares a striking similarity with the prayers said for the deceased clergy at an East Syriac funeral. The fragment could be a sheet torn off from a liturgical book used in Turfan?

### 3. Remarks

Chinese archaeologists have concluded that the ruins of Xipang/Shüipang was a monastery of the Church of the East from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century based on published studies on the unearthed manuscripts and their own excavation in the past years. Their data show that the monastery was in use at mainly three historical periods, but only during the first two periods, i.e. Tang period and the Uighur Qocho period, it functioned as a monastery. The Qing period saw the rooms being turned into stables. Would that be possible that after the monastery fell into disuse as a monastery, especially after the arrival of Islam in the Turfan Oasis, the place may have been used as a caravan-sarai and the stables were used for the caravan travellers?

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collection, except that in the Badger’s collection, it reads: “Lord of our death and life”. Cf. BADGER1852, 282, 283. See also ft. 40.

<sup>39</sup> BADGER1852, 282.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 297.

The re-discovery of the Shüipang monastery causes us to raise many questions in the midst of excitement. First, did the monastery function from the Tang to the Uighur Qocho period continuously and throughout or did it belong to two different periods of Christian groups (Sogdian and Turkic) separately? From the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the Church of the East in Turfan used Syriac as the liturgical language. That is why most of the Syriac fragments have liturgical content. However, Sogdian and Old Turkic/Old Uighur were the two vernacular languages which began to influence the liturgical language. Sogdian migration to Turfan occurred from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, i.e., the Tang period when Syriac Christianity in Turfan displayed Iranian influences and the Christian community in Turfan was predominantly Sogdian. After the 9<sup>th</sup> century when the Uighurs from Upper Mongolia began to settle down in Turfan and established their Uighur Kingdom of Qocho, a gradual Turkicisation began to happen in the Turfan Oasis and the Sogdian influence was in decline.<sup>44</sup> Some of the Uighurs evidently became Christian. Did Uighur Christians take over the monastery or the Sogdian and Uighur Christians became integrated with each other?

Secondly, how did Christians choose their site to build their monasteries, as there were contemporary Buddhist monasteries in the neighbourhood as well. Buddhist manuscripts were also found in the Shüipang ruins. There were contemporary Sogdian and Uighur Manicheans and Buddhists living in Turfan. Turfan was mainly a Buddhist stronghold before the advent of Islam in the oasis in the middle of the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>45</sup> How did Christians interact with Buddhists and Manicheans in Turfan, as they shared the same ethnic and linguistic backgrounds? Photos taken in 1905 and 1909 show that water resources and forests were still existent in the depression near the northern slope of the monastery. This might be one of the reasons for choosing the monastery location in medieval times. The monastery may have well served as a caravan-sarai for travellers throughout its functional period.

Thirdly, Shüipang should be interpreted against a larger context of Turfan, western China and the Silk Road where Indian, Iranian, Uighurs and Chinese once exercised their influences. The Style of paintings are of Greco-Indian style but with East Asian influences.<sup>46</sup> The Shüipang ruins have displayed the styles of murals, characteristic of both the Tang and the Uighur Qocho periods. This will give art historians plenty of work to do.

In the hope that the monastery ruins will be cleaned up, further excavated and the unearthed artefacts be catalogued, especially the carbon dating be conducted in

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. TANG 2020, 128-129.

<sup>45</sup> See a previous study of the current author on the religious conversions of the Uighurs. Cf. TANG 2005.

<sup>46</sup> VON LE COQ 1909, 317

the near future, the present paper with its preliminary commentary seeks to pave the way for future researches.

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# CHRISTIAN REMAINS IN MONGOLIA: AN INTRODUCTION AND UPDATE

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## Introduction

This study introduces the Christian remains in Mongolia and gives an update of recent related archaeological finds. Several lasting monuments of undoubted Christian history have been found in Mongolia so far. Eight immovable monuments have been reportedly found, including four ancient written monuments, three petroglyphs and one stone statue. There are more than ten movable monuments, including four metal crosses. (1) Four discovered inscriptions have been found. These include two Syriac and one Chinese inscriptions from Ulaan tolgoi and the Turkic inscription of Suujiin khad (Suuj Rock). (2) Two rock carvings have been discovered with a cross. These include the Daagan chuluu (Daagan Stone) in Bayankhongor province and the cross engraved rock in Arkhangai province. (3) Two tombstones have been found. These include the graves of the Ikh Ubgun in Umnugobi province (white cross) and the grave №17 of Tagaanchuluut in the Dornod province (silver cup engraved with thirteen crosses), (4) Four metal crosses were found. These include the a) Brass cross in the Archeological Institute of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, b) The bronze cross from the local museum of Dundgobi province, c) the brass crosses in Sukhbaatar province. (5) Dayanbaatar stone with the bird shaped cross. (6) A total of 10 more key discoveries, including bricks with cross from Erdenezuu Monastery from Kharkhorum, have been typically reported to us.

Christian remains in Mongolia were not known in Mongolia until the 1990s, as only a few mentions of them appeared in published articles and there were no specific publications for this study. In 2003, Dr. Boldbaatar Yundenbat published the article titled “*Three Monuments to Connect to the Nestorians*” in the Scientific Journal of Anthropology, Archeology and Ethnology, at the National University of Mongolia.<sup>1</sup> This was a concise, introductory article that was carefully compiled from archaeological discoveries supporting the specific history of Christianity in Mongolia. In 2006, a joint research tour of the KBS (Korean Broadcasting System) documentary crew, Sword Production and historian O. Bolormaa led by Dr. Lee Junggi, started a new project called

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<sup>1</sup> See BOLDBAATAR 2003.



“Nestorian Remains from Mongolia.” As a result of this research trip, remarkable photographs of archeological monuments related to Christian history were documented and brief articles were published. One of the thematic projects, which was carried out at the National University of Mongolia was a book titled *From the Brief History about Christianity in the Middle Ages in Mongolia* (2009) written by Dr. Erdenebat Ulambayar.<sup>2</sup> This remarkable monograph is considered to be a collection of studies of archeological finds related to Christianity in Mongolia. In 2016, the current author published a brief history of Christianity in Central Asia.<sup>3</sup> Within the framework of this study, the project related to Christianity was launched and carried out from 2017 to 2019, and a documentary called “In Search of the Sacred Book” was also released in 2019.

### Turkic Inscription of Suujiin Davaa

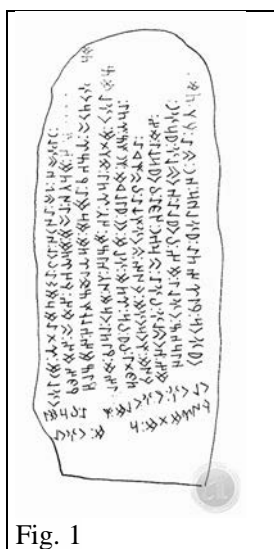


Fig. 1

An inscription in Turkic Runes was discovered over a hundred years ago, and unfortunately so far no one has ever looked at it. The first person who discovered the inscription was the notable Finnish scholar Ramstedt.<sup>4</sup> He gave the very first information about this Turkic writing. It is believed that it was discovered around Mountain Namnan in Saikhan Soum of Bulgan province, Mongolia. Ramstedt noted that he discovered inscription on stele while traveling through the places of Qin Wang Khanddorj of Tusheet Khan League (*aimag*) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ramstedt, a Finnish scholar, visited Mongolia four times, the first time in 1889, twice in 1909, and the last time in 1912. He described the place where Suuj's inscription was discovered as the northern edge of Khanddorj Qin Wang's *aimag*. Dr. Bold noted that the monument belongs to a Uyghur nobleman who lived between AD 840 and 960 and

was located on the north side of the Selenge River and, by general orientation and seemed to be a Bulgan *aimag* (Saikhan sum?) Suujiin Davaa (Peak of Suuj).<sup>5</sup> Since then several searches have been conducted but the inscription has not been found. The inscription discovered by Ramstedt was believed to be dated to AD 800s.<sup>6</sup> This inscription contains an eleven-line writing in ancient Turkic. Ramstedt undoubtedly made a very first German translation from Turkic. Russian

<sup>2</sup> ERDENEBAT 2009.

<sup>3</sup> See: BORLOMAA 2016.

<sup>4</sup> RAMSTEHT-KRUEGER 1978

<sup>5</sup> BOLD 1990, 87

<sup>6</sup> RAMSTEDT 1913, 3-9

scholars G.I. Aidarov and Malov translated from Turkic<sup>7</sup> into Russian, Dr. L. Bold translated the Russian into Mongolian and the current author rendered an English translation.<sup>8</sup> The following displays the three translations: (a). Turkic transcription; (b). Russian translation by Aidarov and Malov; (c). Mongolian translation by L. Bold; and (d). English translation by O. Bolormaa.

- 1a: Uyğur: yerinte: Yağlaqar: qan: ata: keltim:  
 1b: Уйгурскую землю я, Яглакар хан ата, пришел:  
 1c: Уйгур газрын Яглагар хан эцэг би ирлээ:  
 1d: In Uighur land I, Yaglagar Khan Ata (father), have come.
- 2a: Qırqız: oğulı: Boyla: Qutluğ: Yarıǵan:  
 2b: Уйгурскую землю я, Яглакар хан ата, пришел:  
 2c: Би Кырк Азын хүү, Бойло Күтлүг Ярган гэж билээ:  
 2d: I am the son of Kyurk Az, i-Boilo Kutluk Yargan:
- 3a: men: Qutluγ: Baǵa: Tarqan: Öge: Buγuqı: men:  
 3b: Я-огя-Буюрук Кутлуг бага таркана.  
 3c: Би Кутлуг бага дархан, ухаант Буюруг цолтой билээ:  
 3d: I am a wise Kutluk Buγruk, minor Tarkhan (title).
- 4a: küm: suruǵım: kün: toǵusıqa: batısıqa:  
 4b: Слух обо мне разнесся от востока до захода солнца.  
 4c: Наран ургах зүүн зүгээс, наран шингэх баруун зүг хүртэл нэр алдар минь түгэн тархлаа.  
 4d: My name is well known (all over the world), from the rising to the setting of the sun.
- 5a: tegdi: bay: bar: ertim: aǵılam: on: yılıqm: sansız: erti:  
 5b: Я был богат. У меня было десять загонов и скота без счета:  
 5c: Баян бөлгөө би, бэлчээр (нутаг) минь арав, адуу минь тоогүй олон ажгуу:  
 5d: I was wealthy, I owned ten pastures and numerous horses:
- 6a: inim: yeti:urum: üç: qızım: üç: erti: ebledim: oǵulımın:  
 6b: У меня было семь младших братьев, трое сыновей и три дочери. Я женил своих сыновей:  
 6c: Надад долоон дүү, гурван хүү, гурван охин бий. Хөвгүүдээ гэрлүүлэв:  
 6d: I had seven brothers, three sons and three daughters. My sons got married:

<sup>7</sup> «Сүүжийн» битиктасы (Suujin bichig-Inscription of Suuj). 2020. Retrieved 3 23, 2020, from <http://atalarmirasi.org/34-suuzhiyn-bitiktasy>

<sup>8</sup> BOLORMAA 2020, 92.

- 7a: qızımın: qalıqsız bertim: imigima: yüz er: turuğ: /ber/tim:  
 7b: Своих дочерей выдал замуж без выкуна. Своему учителю я дал сто человек и стошку:  
 7c: Охиноо сүй бэлэггүйгээр хадамд гаргав. Номлон сургагчдаа зуун эр, нутаглах газар өгөв би:  
 7d: My daughters got married without betrothal gifts. To my preacher (Mar), I gave a hundred men and land:
- 8a: yeginmin: atımın: körtim: imti: öltüm: .....  
 8b: Я видал своих племянников и внуков, теперь я умер:  
 8c: Үр ачаа үзлээ би, Одоо үхэхэд гомдолгүй:  
 8d: I saw my nephews and grandchildren. Then I have no regret to die:
- 9a: oğulımın: erde imigim anča: bol: qanqa: atap: qadıqlan:  
 9b: Моя сын, будь как мой учитель, слуши хану, лушайся.  
 9c: Хөвгүүд минь номлон сургагч шиг болог. Хаандаа хатуужин зүтгэ:  
 9d: My son, Be like my preacher (Mar), be loyal (listen) to the king, serve:
- 10a: Uluğ oğulım: s.....bardı:  
 10b: Мой старший сын ... ушел:  
 10c: Их хүү мин... очив:  
 10d: My oldest son ... gone:
- 11a: ...körmedim: ır.....: oğul  
 11b: Я не видел ... сына ...  
 11c: Үзсэнгүй би... хүү (минь)  
 11d: I did not see ... (my) son

From the beginning people suggested that inscription was the Uighur Empire (740-840) trace. Then on the second line he called himself son of Kyarkaz. Some scholars still believe that the writing remains a monument of the Kyrgyz period. The word “mar” in line 9 typically representing the teacher of the Eastern Church, Mar and monument have long been considered a legacy to the Nestorians.

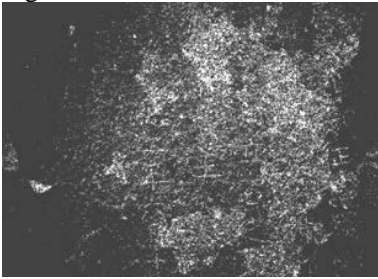
### **Syriac and Chinese Inscriptions from Ulaan Tolgoi**

The three inscriptions are found about 33 km from the center of Munkhairkhan soum, Khovd province. The area is called Ulaantolgoi because it has a unique head of large red stones. The Syriac inscriptions of this red head was first described in 1988 by archeologists Dr. D. Bayar and V.E. Voitov with the help of a local doctor. Archaeologist D. Bayar, in his published article “A newly discovered ancient monuments in Western Mongolia” states that “The inscription

is territorially within the boundaries of the Naiman aimag" <sup>9</sup> in 1990. Archaeologist Boldbaatar Yundenbat clarified some letters in certain parts of the inscriptions and noted that "[c]omparing the letter form and writing to the various sources found elsewhere, it is the ancient Syrian letter used by Nestorians in Central and Middle Asia from the 6th to the 15<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>10</sup>

The inscriptions were fully read 27 years after its discovery. The Ulaan tolgoi consists precisely of several discovered inscriptions. The three legible inscriptions are found at the end of the rocks. Dr. Takashi Osawa, Dr. Guunii Lkundev, Dr. Saito Shigeo and Dr. Hidemi Takahashi read accurately and published the particular report in 2015.

Fig.2



Text of Chinese inscription (Fig 2), occupying an area 120 cm by 72 cm and consisting of six columns<sup>11</sup> now barely legible: "the eighteenth day of the sixth month of the second year of Dade" (corresponding to 28<sup>th</sup> July 1298) along with the name "Wang Wen", "Prince Gaotang", "Military Expedition" suggesting that the inscriptions somehow related to a military campaign led by prince.

Dr. Takashi and others noted the first Syriac inscription (Fig 3), on the same piece of rock as the Chinese inscription, beginning at approximately 30 cm to the right of the Chinese inscription. The inscription is written vertically, and the first two lines of the inscription measure approximately 72 cm and 78 cm in length. The last line, 30 cm in length, ends at a point 48 cm above the ground"<sup>12</sup> and "God whose dwelling place is holy, 1609 of the Greeks (AD 1298)". This is taken from Psalms 68:5. Offset a little to the right above the middle line of the inscription is a cross measuring 16 cm by 8 cm. There seem also to be traces of what may have been another cross at the same height a little to the right of the center line of the first line.

Fig.3



<sup>9</sup> BAYAR 1990, 37-40

<sup>10</sup> BOLORMAA 2016, 46

<sup>11</sup> TAKASHI-LKHUNDEV-SAITO-TAKAHASHI 2015, 196.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

Fig. 4



C. Dr. Takashi and others noted, “Second Syriac inscription (Fig 4) is located approximately 11m to the south and downhill from the other two inscriptions, towards the bottom left corner of a side of a 5.30-meter high triangular boulder standing free from the piles of rocks nearby. The text of the Syriac inscription is written vertically within a square area 120 cm by 120 cm, whose surface has been rubbed off and appears whiter than the surrounding rock face. The last line of the inscription is now lost.” The text is that of Psalm 125.2: “Jerusalem, the mountains surround her;

<and> the Lord surrounds his people, [henceforth and for evermore].<sup>13</sup>

### Cross-Engraved Stone: DAAGAN CHULUU

A relevant monument to the early Christian history of Mongolia was a cross-engraved stone (Fig. 5), located in Bayanbulag *soum* of Bayankhongor province. The locals call it a Daagan chuluu (Daaga refers to a 2-year old horse, chuluu means stone). The stone monument with the cross is located about 7 km from the center of Bayanbulag *soum* at the foot of the mountain called Red High. The first published report of the stone was given by Dr. Boldbaatar in his scientific article. He noted, “The name of the stone, according to the local people, had to be tied around this rock by the horses, who had long since rallied to compete at the local festival”<sup>14</sup> In terms of the historical chronology of the stone, we are currently pursuing the proposal of archeologist Dr. Boldbaatar Yundenbat, which suggests that “the stone belongs to the Naiman aimag (12<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries) before the Great Mongol Empire.”<sup>15</sup> The granite is about 1.65 meters high, 2.5 meters long and 50 cm wide. There are a large number of round hollows on the front and right sides of the stone, leaving a clear symmetrical cross in the center of the front surface. There is a square cross in the middle of the stone. The four sides of the cross, which are drawn on the stone, are engraved in equal size. The length of the cross is about 40 cm, about 10 cm from the top. The bulbous, round bells on the tip of the cross are about 5-6 cm. A large number of round hollows were also found, of which about 100 were located, 80 of which in common are on the southwest plane. The diameter of the round hollow is 3.5-4 cm. The visible image of the stone's cross is chronically annealed from year to year, and some of it is now virtually invisible. A comparison of 2006 and 1996 illustrate that part of the cross has disappeared about 5 cm from the top. The local

Fig.5



<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 194-195.

<sup>14</sup> BOLDBAATAR 2003, 107.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 109.

people put melted butter on the apex of the sacred stone, which caused the damage to the stone. The stone was filmed<sup>16</sup> and studied by scholars in 2003, 2006 and 2017.<sup>17</sup>

### Cross-Engraved Rock

A recent monument that is related to the history of Christianity in Mongolia is a cross-engraved rock found in 2016 from the Erdenemandal *soum* of Arkhangai province (Fig.6).<sup>18</sup> The historical monument is located more than 30 km west of the center of Erdenemandal *soum*, Arkhangai *aimag*. The monument is discovered in the middle of a visible peak called Mandal cliff (Mandal *tshio*). It was discovered in 2016 by archeologists Dr. Erdene-Ochir and G. Tserenbumuu, of the Library of Erdenemandal *soum* with the valuable help of locals. The visible cross-engraved stone looks different from the other stones nearby. Next to the rock there was a stone like a chair and the local people call it a seat. Only a cross was painted on that rock, with no other traces of inscription. The ordinary shape of the visible rock looks like a rhombus, and it is easy to recognize why this attractive stone was selected deliberately by the local maker. The stone width is 95 cm and its considerable height is about 95 cm. But the considerable length of the illuminated cross is 40 cm. The visible cross includes a triangular frame on four sides, done intentionally, and the broadest part of the visible tip is about 11 cm. Objectively analyzing the visible image of the illuminated cross on the marked stone, one finds that it is comparatively shallow. The discovered stone undoubtedly remains a significant monument testifying to the Christian history in Central Mongolia, which has been reasonably protected by local authorities. Regarding the historical date, no detailed research has been conducted, and it is assumed that it is a valuable stone of the 10<sup>th</sup> - 12<sup>th</sup> centuries. The current author visited the site and filmed the stone in 2017 and 2019.

Fig. 6



### White Cross from Grave of Ikh Uvgun

A burial site (№ 17) of the Mongol era belonging to a young woman aged 18 to 25 was found in the Nomgon *soum* of Umnugobi province. The tomb was carefully excavated by the National University of Mongolia's archeological team during their expedition in 2009,<sup>19</sup> who confirmed that it was the burial of a Nestorian woman. From this grave they found a very interesting artifact of a cross related to Christianity in Central Asia. The grave №17 was located (N420 53843.5; E1050 29802.68; ALT1553 m) at the foot of a small dovecote on the eastern slope of the Great Old Mountain. At a proper depth of 120 cm, a burial

<sup>16</sup> BOLORMAA 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 2020, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 2017, 230.

<sup>19</sup> TUMEN-NAVAAN-ERDENE-KHATANBAATAR 2008.

was discovered. Presenting with to the human stratum state, the head was directed northward, with the high mountain apex at the rear of the discovered tomb, typically lying on its back and with its two hands carefully tucked underneath along the body. No coffin was found. Below the grave, however, traces of thick felt spread throughout the floor. Except for the splint-bones, other bones were excellently preserved and confirmed to be those of a young Mongolian woman of about 18 to 25 years old. The discovered remains of the hat were under the preserved bones of the human head. She had a long cotton gown which wrapped around her and surrounded her face. Her flowing coat (deel) had deteriorated after being under the dust for a long time. Only the tufts of the outer lining, the right sleeve, and the frontal lobe were found. The gorgeous deel was made of cocoon saliva, yellow, and finely woven silk, with a long skirt with many folds, and the upper front was left-pressed. Among other unearthed objects are two pieces of swing earrings made of white shells with a height of 1.7 cm, a width of 1.2 cm and a thickness of 0.7 cm; two pieces of a pendant necklace, one being 1.6 cm high, 1.1 cm wide and 0.6 cm thick, the other being 1.4 cm high and 1 cm wide is 0.4 cm thick; two pieces of stone necklaces repaired as droplets of water, one pendant being 1.7 cm high, 0.5-1.2 cm wide and 0.2-0.4 cm thick and the other being 1.6 cm high and 0.4-1.2 cm wide and 0.2-0.4 cm thick; and a pearl necklace with a small black speck of foam made of artificial materials on the surface. It is white and has a thick, round shape, with diameter 1.2 cm and thickness 0.9 cm. Finally, four pieces of *Chong* (Tibet word, red-brown colored of chalcedony) necklaces were discovered. All have perforated holes for insertion of ties.

Undoubtedly, most interesting finding was a white cross found from the grave (Fig.7). Dr. Erdenebat Ulambayar explained, it is a jeweled cross. The white bone shells are four-shaped like flower petals, 0.3 cm wide, 0.5 cm long. At the upper end of the jeweled cross there is a little fan to properly fasten the ties, and it was cracked. It is of a considerable size, up to 1.7 cm high, 1.7 cm wide and 0.35 cm thick (Fig. 7).<sup>20</sup> The material of the cross from the young woman's grave is still relevant to us. Some researchers believe that this material is a type of clay, but further research is needed. The 17<sup>th</sup> grave of the Ikh Uvgun, which has been carefully considered as a monument to the Mongolian tribes of the 13<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, depicts features of the funeral procession and historic artifacts. But the jeweled cross from the discovered grave is unique in its ritual of producing amulets and faces, carefully wrapping its neck in a hat. This may be likely the burial of a woman from the Khereit *aimag*, located north of the desert.

Fig. 7



<sup>20</sup> ERDENEBAT 2009, 50.

### Cross-Engraved Silver Bowl

Fig. 8



One of the surprising finds from Mongolia is the discovery of a silver bowl engraved with crosses and a metal rod which looks like a cross from the grave (Fig. 8). They were discovered in a Mongol-era grave at Tsagaanchuluut in Gurvanzagal *soum* of the Dornod province. There are about 160 burial sites carefully counted, and the local granite rocky head of the

Tsagaanchuluut has long engaged the historical interest of researchers.

In 2008, the specific objects were found in tomb №1 of six graves of the excavations by a team who carried out their project Dornod-Mongol of the Department of Archeology and Anthropology, National University of Mongolia. The burial site is located at N 49° 05'23.6 " and E 115° 02'29.0 "Alt 929 m and at the bottom edge of a total of six tombs. The grave was found at a depth of 162 cm. The man's grave whose head was pulled northeast was buried and his bow cases tucked away in his left palm. The deceased's right arm was properly placed under the armpit, and the left arm was stretched out, and the mighty paws were placed on the forearm. Apparently, there were around seven arrows in total. The report regarding the silver cup stated: In the left arm of the dead man, there was a thin, baseless, unpalatable silver bowl wrapped in cloth... and placed in a plank casket, the lid of which was severely deteriorated and there were no marks left. The metal parts very well preserved from the legs of the coffin (Apparently the handle was in the coffin lid.).<sup>21</sup> Following the results of the tomb excavation, the following two finds bring attention to researchers. First is the metal rod of a coffin (Fig 9).

Fig. 9



The published report accurately states on the coffin metal rod: It seems that the metal rod was handled to nail the outer wall of the foot section of the coffin and lower into the hole... From a possible link connecting the trunk to a rod-shaped object typically resembling a Christian cross. Its reasonable length is 8 cm.<sup>22</sup> It is noteworthy that the convenient handle, as shown in the prominent figure, was intended for fastening and undoubtedly has a cross shape. Second is this silver bowl (Fig. 8), engraved with crosses, which is one of the most interesting finds in this tomb. The ritual of breaking the bowl was a key part of the Mongolian burial ritual. The Buriers followed that rule accurately. The silver bowl was broken intentionally. The number of crosses engraved was exactly thirteen. The report states the discovery of the silver cup: A thin silver bowl found with a scarf

<sup>21</sup> TUMEN-KHABANBAATER-ANKHSANAA 2010, 33.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 34.



on a thick cloth. No base, flat bottom. A 1-cm wide water pattern around the rim of the bowl and a cross symbol were intentionally struck in the possible space between it. They equally struck the bottom and made fine lines.<sup>23</sup> The notable addition of the silver cup and the handle of the visible cross still await a compelling explanation.

### **Brass Cross I**

The brass cross (Fig. 10), once kept in the Archeological Institute of the Academy of Sciences, went to the personal collection. It was found in Umnugobi *aimag*. The cross is in the middle with a gammadion and connected by their drum. As Dr. Erdenebat noted, it was made by brass. A proper thickness is 0.3 cm and a height is 4.2 × 4.1 cm. The height of the cross hand is 1.4 cm, width is 0.5-1.2 cm and connected it in a straight line to each operative corner of a square frame with a gammadion from the center of the image. One of these hands was broken. One of the hands has an I-letter written is 0.8 cm long; the other three hands have a T-shaped letter and are 0.8 × 0.6 cm long. The proper shape of the ridge, mainly molded to the back of the cross, is 0.35-0.5 cm thick with a height of 1 cm and a width of 2 cm × 2.2 cm. It can be marked to be fastened to something like a garment and worn.”<sup>24</sup> The Belgian missionary and Mongolist Antoon Mostaert, typically began collecting crosses from Mongolia and found a brass cross on a Bor *balgas* in Ordos’s *aimag* (Inner Mongolia, China) in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mostaert collected more than three hundred of these crosses from the southern part of the territory of the Mongols, likely most of which are stored in the Museum of the University of Hong Kong and in the Museum of Hohhot of Inner Mongolia.

### **Bronze Cross II**

This bronze cross (Fig. 11) is properly stored in the local museum of Mandalgobi city, in Dundgobi province. It has been preserved in the museum since the 1980s, after collection by locals. The decorated top of the cross has disappeared, although the original colors are pretty much the same and the two-flowered shape of the cross still stands out. The bronze cross is 4.7 cm high 4.1 cm wide and 0.4 cm thick. Compared to the Umnugobi’s jeweled cross, there is no decorative ornament on the face and no iconic image of Christ. The ends of what are considered four of his hands were molded into blossoms, resembling flower petals, and a little fan to attach the straps to them, which would have been broken and disappeared.<sup>25</sup> Similar findings to the jeweled cross were found by Japanese scientists at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Shiliin Gol *aimag*, Inner Mongolia. It is mentioned in the personal work of Japanese researcher Torii Ryuzo.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> ERDENEBAT 2009, 36.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>26</sup> RYUZO 1928, 430.

### Brass Crosses II, III (Fig 12)

In 2006, former teacher S. Luvsannorob (Dariganga *soum* of Sukhbaatar province) published a valuable book called *The Human-Bronze Craft: A Memorable Bronze Age in Dariganga*. This book contains a private collection of about 400 bronze items that he carefully collected from his ancestors through generations. Among his private collections are odd crosses made of brass and with visible holes for straps around the neck.<sup>27</sup> There is no other study related to these findings.

Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 12



### Bricks With Cross

Fig. 13



The Mongolia-Germany Qaraqorum Expedition team began extensive excavations in 2000. An important result of this excavation was the remarkable discovery that the main palace, which for many years was considered to be the "Great Palace of Ugudei Khan", was also a Buddhist temple. Excavations at the Erdenezuu Temple began after it was proven that the site, which was considered a palace, was a Buddhist temple and the palace district. They excavated decorative bricks that covered the wall dating back to the early 13<sup>th</sup>

century. A possible total of 80 decorative bricks were found during excavations at Erdenezuu Monastery during 2004 and 2005, 40 of them with vivid images and, six bricks with remarkable pictures of the visible crosses. Five blue bricks with a cross stamp were found intact and one was broken in half. The proper bricks were found to be precisely "32×15×6, 32×15.5×6, 32×15.2×6.4, and 31.5×15×5.5 and 31.5×16×5.4 cm, respectively (Fig. 13).<sup>28</sup> Research on these bricks is still ongoing. In 2020, they were unveiled to the public for the first time and exhibited in a museum in Erdenezuu.

<sup>27</sup> ERDENEBAAT 2009, 39.

<sup>28</sup> ERDENEBAAT 2018, 140.

Fig. 14.



### Stone of Dayanbaatar (Fig 14)

The stone is likely first mentioned by the Russian researcher G. Potanin (19th century). The current author visited Dayanbaatar's stone in 2006 and 2017 to film for a documentary. This stone is located on the border with Mongolia in the Sagsai *soum* of the Bayan-Ulgii province. Foremost, the stone is the only bird-shaped pendant necklace found in Mongolia that is relevant to the history of the Turkic and Uighur periods. We consider this stone as a trace of Christianity in Central Asia. As Dr. Ser-Odjav mentioned, the cross-stained stone found on the western border of Mongolia for the first time is a one-time cross-stained stone found in

Central Asia and seems to be a sign of the spread of Christianity among the Turks.<sup>29</sup> The first remarkable thing we carefully observe is the wooden house. According to G. Potanin, the stone was erected with wooden buildings, and the locals would jump off their horses and worship.<sup>30</sup> When we saw this rare stone in 2006, no one knew about the wooden building which realistically was a private house or sacred temple. That is why Potanin's historical report is receiving our focused attention, *as* those passing the discovered stone leaped off their horses and bowed down. In 2006, an expedition team was told by local Kazakhs that he remembered the name of the Dayanbaatar (which means Dayan Hero) was ancient, and the human stone symbolized someone with power and authority. They have been worshipping this iconic statue for a long time, but unfortunately it was impossible to go to see it because of the relocation of the border zone near the monument. Researchers deliver various opinions on the image of a bird lying on a human stone. There are some notable mentions in the published work "Mongol Altai-Soyon's Natural Heritage-Archeological monuments" (2001), which carefully noted that The unusual discovery of a stone statue with the eagle in the Altai-Soyon region has been undoubtedly of concerned interest to researchers for many years... it was located near the Dayan lake in the Tsengel *soum* of Bayan-Ulgii province.<sup>31</sup> It was also reported that a stone with a similar bird-shaped pendant was discovered in Kyrgyzstan. Dr. Bayar Dovdoi noted that the bird-shaped pendant worn on a man's neck is properly unshaped as a cross, which represents a symbol of Christianity. The local tribe of the eastern Turkic kingdom had many bird worshipping tribes<sup>32</sup> which means this was not a cross. The various opinions about the pendant's specific shape and the sacred stone's controversy, however, remain firstly due to the fact that no similar monument has

<sup>29</sup> SER-ОДЖАВ 1970, 64. (Ser-Odjav.N, 1970, p. 64)

<sup>30</sup> ПОТАНИНЫМЬ 1881, 72.

<sup>31</sup> ЛХАГВАСУРЕН-БЯМБАДОРЖ-БАТСУХ 2001, 31. Not in the shores of the Dayan lake, but inside the border fence in Sagsai *soum*.

<sup>32</sup> БАЯР-ЕРДЕНЕБААТАР 1999, 74-75.

been found so far, which may delay the final conclusion of the study, and secondly, that the study of Christianity in Mongolia was merely beginning.

## Conclusion

In recent years, research into the pastoral history of Central Asia including Mongolian history, has taken a new turn, as the interest in the historical evolution of nomadic religion and its spiritual life has grown increasingly popular, and studies have been undertaken to address this need. The current article aims to contribute to the possible expansion of the Nestorian study based on relevant archeological findings. In the course of this study, we are confronted with the following issues. Firstly, the currently found silver bowl carefully carved with jeweled crosses is, in reality, the very first traditional style artifact related to Christianity in Central and Eastern Asia. A comparative study of material culture is needed because the visible cross of the silver cup is engraved in a more elegant shape than the simple crosses found in the nomadic lands. Secondly, the white cross of the grave of the Ikh Uvgun was a unique find in terms of the chosen material. There is much need for further study of the cross material in the future. Thirdly, the inscription of Suujiin bichig is reasonably considered as an equivalent find that remains in Central Asia. There is, however, a need for further academic study on where this inscription may have been preserved and when and how it suddenly disappeared. Fourthly, it is necessary to confirm the precise chronology of the newly discovered Erdenemandal's Cross. Fifthly, the bird-shaped image of the Dayanbaatar's stone needs to be reviewed whether it is related to Christianity. In addition, the historical remnants of Christianity in the urban areas, including the re-examination of the desolate ruins of the Nestorian church in the northern part of the Qaraqorum city need to be investigated. Finally, there are open tasks to further explore the specific location of the Wang Khan's palace of the Kerait in the Tuul Basin in Ulaanbaatar, and to conduct an extensive search for movable and immovable artifacts of Christianity in Mongolia.

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## THE CHURCH OF THE EAST CEMETERY AT İLIBALYK

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Since 2018, an international team of archaeologists have excavated the human remains of more than 80 graves at Usharal-İlibalyk near Zharkent, Kazakhstan. This marked the first excavation of a cemetery of a Christian community in Central Asia—most likely associated with the Church of the East—in more than 130 years. This paper will provide an initial survey of the findings as it pertains to the methods of interment, grave goods, and evidence of funerary meals. While analysis continues, particularly in the area of forensics and DNA samples, initial observations demonstrate that homogeneous burial practices combined with the find spots of the gravestones confirm that those buried in the cemetery are directly connected to the stones themselves, which provide clear evidence of a significant Church of the East cemetery of the indigenous population dating to the 13th and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In 2014, a Kazakh school teacher in the Panfilov district of southeast Kazakhstan, just a few kilometers from the Chinese border, reported the discovery of a large meter-long stone of gray granite which contained a Maltese-shaped cross (sometimes referred to as the True Cross, or Calvary Cross) along with an accompanying unknown inscription to the Archaeological Institute of Kazakhstan. The Institute sent a worker to retrieve the stone, located in an old melon patch just outside of the small village of Usharal, a former Soviet collective farm founded in the early 1930s.

Both villagers and local archaeologists knew that a significant population had lived in this fertile area in previous centuries located between two small streams, the Karasu and Dirgulyk —offshoots of the nearby Ili and Osek Rivers. Often when villagers dug a foundation for a new home or plowed in the field, they found whole pottery vessels and rumors circulated about the discovery of an occasional human body. Most of the local farmers viewed the cultural material as insignificant at best and a nuisance at worst, getting in the way of growing crops. The area just north of the village obviously provided evidence of previous human occupation as indicated by the massive blanket of pottery sherds and even the quite visible portion of mudbrick wall that snaked along the eastern stream.

Despite the 70 years of agricultural activity, small mounds of former structures are still visible, particularly in the 380 X 350-meter *shahristan*—the innermost,

fortified administrative center—appearing as undulating hills to the untrained eye. Prior to the discovery of our large stone, the only digging apart from farmers on the site was the occasional treasure hunter, whose coin hordes sold via the internet, eventually enabled archaeologists in Kazakhstan to accurately hypothesize that this city just 53 kilometers across the mountains from the former capitol of the Chagatai Mongol khanate of Almalyk was the city of Ilibalyk.<sup>1</sup> The name is derived from the Turco-Persian roots: “Ili” for *hook* and “Balik” for city, or specifically, “City along the Hook River.” This large urban area, while actually 24 km from the Ili River in antiquity, proved to be the largest medieval city in the Ili River Valley.

Other than a few historical references to the city, nothing excepting the most general information was known of Ilibalyk or its inhabitants. Numismatic evidence indicates that it was under Karluk rule and specifically the Muslim rulers of the Karakhanid dynasty of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, just as most of the Zhetisu (Semirechye) area of today’s southeastern Kazakhstan and northwestern Kyrgyzstan.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, the Mongols asserted their suzerainty over the region—first under the united Mongol khanate and then under the rule of Chagatai, Chinggis Khan’s son and his successors— which is also borne out in the evidence of the coinage. Currently, best estimates attribute occupation of the city from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (fig. 1<sup>3</sup>).

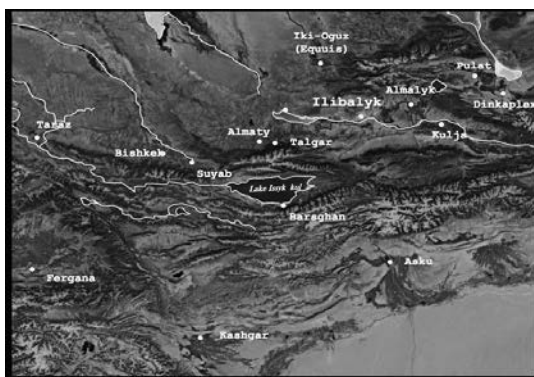


Fig. 1

<sup>1</sup> PETROV ET AL 2014, 61-76. Ilibalyk has a number of variant spellings depending upon the source, Persian *Ilanbalyk*; Armenian *Ilanbalex*; Chinese *I-li-ba-li*.

<sup>2</sup> While internationally the area is referred to as *Semirechye*, which is the Russian words for “Seven Rivers” referring to the seven rivers flowing from the Tien Shan mountains that make up the region stretching throughout southeast Kazakhstan and northern Kyrgyzstan, the local designation with the same translation is *Zhetisu*.

<sup>3</sup> All figures in this paper are provided by the current author. The original photos are in colour. See figure captions at the end of this paper.

Thanks to the facilitation of American NGO worker Kevin White and Kazakhstani archaeologists Dr. Dmitry Voyakin and the late Professor Karl Baipakov; an international expedition began initial surveys and excavations on the territory of Usharal-*Ilibalyk*.<sup>4</sup> Sponsorship for the project came from Dr. Christoph Baumer's Society of the Exploration of Eurasia and the Tandy Institute for Archaeology, under the auspices of Dr. Stephen Ortiz and Dr. Thomas Davis in the United States provided archaeological teams. Local Kazakhs from around the country and even inhabitants from Usharal itself have all labored together since the project began in 2016.

An entire topographical survey of the site revealed the remains of the city covering approximately 5,000 square meters including the typical inner and outer walls incorporating the *shahristan*, the fortified administrative area. Excavations in this area demonstrated at least two phases of occupation from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries as well as a monumental bath house. Extensive pottery finds of glazed fine ware both in the *shahristan* as well as in the area of the *rabad* neighborhoods (areas outside the inner wall) revealed signs of skilled craftsmanship and extensive kilns that produced both metal and ceramic goods.

### Identification of a Church of the East Cemetery

At the conclusion of the 2016 season, while conducting a field survey north of the main site, archaeologists discovered more inscribed gravestones—known in archaeological contexts in Central Asia and Mongolia as *kayraks*— in a concentrated area approximately 2,000 meters from the old city center beyond the northeastern *rabad* (fig. 2).

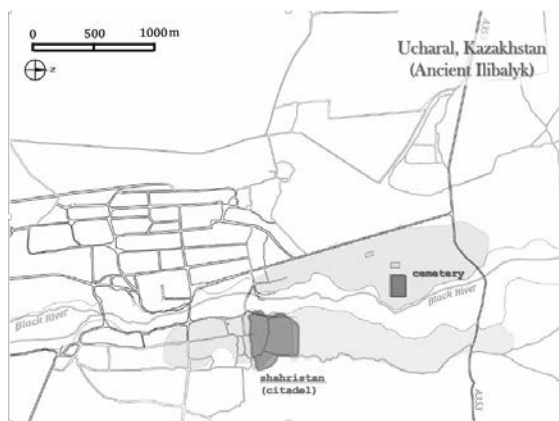


fig. 2

<sup>4</sup> Usharal designates the name of the current village which lies partially on the site located in the Panfilov district of the Almaty Oblast, 11 kilometers west of the administrative capitol of Zharkent.



The seven stones included two with written inscriptions utilizing Syriac letters—one in Syriac language, the other in Old Turkic. The following season, an additional eight stones were found with one containing a very clear inscription in Old Turkic with Syriac script. Despite the obvious evidence for a cemetery due to the close proximity of the stones and even analysis using Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR), no actual graves were found until the third season of excavations in 2018.

Archaeologists determined to penetrate the soil at even lower levels and the team found nine additional *kayraks*, none with writing, yet all with cross inscriptions. This time, archaeologists also found 33 graves, mostly of children, in the location of the gravestone finds. Rather quickly, excavators determined that these graves indicate a homogeneous culture and were connected to the *kayraks* based on proximity and interment practices. The following year (2019), a further 45 graves were exposed with 30 being adult remains with four *in situ* gravestones discovered in and among the remains.

The 2019 excavations enabled archaeologists to make initial determinations on the size and scope of the cemetery. This has proven a challenge since any surface indications disappeared most probably at the start of the 1930s when the region became a Soviet collective farm. Such activity appears to have demolished any visible grave mounds or other features. It is also probable that this agricultural activity resulted in the removal or displacement of many of the gravestones. Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) surveys have also proven inconclusive in determining the limits of the cemetery. However, based on careful exposure of the soil, aided by a providential rainfall at the beginning of the 2019 excavations, grave chambers started to become visible from the soil, revealing mudbrick features as well as faint outlines of various grave pits. Once the archaeological team made this discovery, a water sprayer provided “additional rain” making grave identification significantly easier. In addition to the 80 excavated graves, a further 25 skulls (mostly juveniles) were visible from the exposed surface. Features seen in the soil of the current excavation area (Area C, which measures approximately 1200 m<sup>2</sup>) may reveal an additional 145 graves.

Further test trenches also helped determine the northern and southern boundaries of the cemetery. Therefore, initial conservative estimates incorporating these boundaries together with the highest concentration of *kayrak* finds mean that the cemetery measures 60 m north-to-south by 70 m east-to-west or an area incorporating 4200 m<sup>2</sup>. If the concentration of burials as recorded in Area C (the site of the current excavations) is consistent at 0.14 burials per square meter, this means that the cemetery could contain as many 588 burials. If these estimates are

correct, it would be the largest excavated Church of the East cemetery ever found.<sup>5</sup>

### The *Kayraks* of Ilibalyk

Before providing details on the grave excavations, setting the context of the cemetery’s gravestone finds is necessary. Of the 34 stones discovered so far, three contain fully decipherable inscriptions. One stone is cut (probably by an industrial plow) and can only be partially translated. Three of the inscribed stones are in Old Turkic, the other in Syriac (fig. 3).



fig. 3

Dr. Mark Dickens, a foremost Church of the East scholar has translated all four of the stones. Dr. Charles Stewart, an archaeologist on the Tandy team and Associate Professor of Art History at Benedictine College, USA, has also provided an analysis of the cross iconography. The descriptions below are based on their translation and investigations.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Such a claim is qualified by the fact that the Russian imperial excavator Pantusov’s records from the 1880s are not complete. In addition, no cemetery has ever been found in the vicinity of the known churches excavated in Ak-Beshim (ancient Suyab) in 1954 and 1994 in Kyrgyzstan, but rather burials were discovered within the two churches found on that site.

<sup>6</sup> For a full discussion on the translation of the *kayraks* and their analysis see DICKENS & GILBERT forthcoming (2022); as well as the Ilibalyk preliminary field reports via the Society for the Exploration of Eurasia website, Archaeological Expertise 2017 & 2018.

Certain general conclusions are immediately evident from the analysis of the gravestones of Ilibalyk. First, one sees that some of the city's local indigenous populace were adherents to Syriac Christianity, specifically the Church of the East. Finds in both Syriac, (the liturgical language) and Old Turkic (the indigenous language of the region), were utilized by the community. This demonstrates that at least some of the local Turkic population (i.e. Karluk or the nearby Turco-Mongol tribes) identified with the Church of the East. The names on the gravestones (seven in total) include a biblical name (Petros), Turkic names (Tegiz and Shirin<sup>7</sup>) or combined Syriac-Turkic names (Baršabbā Quč /Quča).

Second, the Church of the East's historical connection to the Christians of Ilibalyk is further solidified by the inscriptions on the gravestones which may refer to name sakes from heroes of the faith. The stone in Syriac simply reads: "This is the grave of Shirin the Believer." While certainly a common name in the Turco-Persian context, there is a possibility this is a namesake for Shirin the Christian queen of the Persian Shah during the late 6<sup>th</sup> and early 7<sup>th</sup> century. And, while Dickens points out that using the term "the believer" simply designated laypersons—as found on other stones of the Zhetisu corpus—the Muslim historian al-Tabarī utilizes the exact phrase of "Shirin the Believer" in identifying the Persian Queen,<sup>8</sup> indicating a continuity of history dating back 600 years. The stories of "Shirin the Believer" passed down through the centuries, most probably through the church liturgy, appears to have inspired the Turkic Christians of Ilibalyk to name at least one of their children after this famous queen.<sup>9</sup>

A similar naming connection may link the dual-named Baršabbā Quč with the fourth century missionary bishop to Merv. Mar Baršabbā also had a connection with a Sassanid dynasty queen. In this case, the queen of Shah Shapur II, Shirahan, was healed by Mar Baršabbā. Following the queen's baptism, the Shah exiled her to Merv. She, in turn, took Mar Baršabbā with her. The story, found in a document from the Turfan oasis, indicates Baršabbā's notoriety as he is credited with bringing the faith to Merv. It is conceivable that 900 years later Christians in Ilibalyk named one of their children after the famous bishop. While speculative, at the very least names such as Shirin and Baršabbā indicate a custom in choosing names linked to eastern Christianity in the Ili valley.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that Shirin is actually a Persian word meaning "sweet" however, it appears this word was later adopted into Old Turkic. Even today this word is found in the modern Turkic languages as a word for *juice* or *sweet*.

<sup>8</sup> HUMPHREYS-AL-TABARĪ 1990, 89.

<sup>9</sup> BAUM 2004. The name Shirin appears on three different gravestones from the Kyrgyzstan corpus, including one with the exact phrase in Syriac, "Shirin the believer." See ZHUMAGULOV 2014, 101-102; 399-400; 446-447.

<sup>10</sup> BAUMER 2016, 72; 178.

Third, Charles Stewart’s analysis of the gravestone iconography demonstrates a broader connection to the universal church and specifically the Calvary or True Cross reliquary located in Jerusalem (**fig. 4**).

While the relationship between Eastern and Western expressions of medieval Christianity is quite complex, the cross inscriptions show a variety of styles and an obvious connection with the Christian world to the West, and specifically with Jerusalem and possibly



fig. 4.

Rome. In other words, the Christian iconography at Ilibalyk, and Semireche or Zhetisu as a whole, suggests they were part of the greater Christian global network during the period in question.

Fourth, names on the Ilibalyk gravestones indicate a generational and organized church community, with specific theological connections. Petros the priest is a biblical name likely associated with the Apostle Peter. Baršabbā Quč, a rare dual name with both Syriac (Son of Sabbath) and Turkic connections (Quč, Turkic for *strength* or *power*), is found on the original meter-long stone in 2014. This particular stone marks the grave of the priest Petros, the son of Tegin, the grandson of Baršabbā Quč—three generations. In addition, it is highly likely that Baršabbā Quč’s own gravestone was found indicating that he was buried with Yoshmid the Priest.<sup>11</sup> This means that two stones make reference to the presence of clergy at Ilibalyk.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the gravestones discovered at Ilibalyk reveal a multi-generational, organized community of Turkic Christians. The human remains found to date also tell us that the community’s children were buried with a distinct Christian cultural identity as proven by the small, simple and, at times crudely carved, stones and/or fired bricks which marked their graves.

### Summary Explanation of Human Remains at the Ilibalyk Cemetery

Initial excavations revealed predominately children’s graves, with only two adult graves found in 2018. However, it is now known that adults were buried in the cemetery, on average, 40 cm lower than children. Subsequent excavations of the

<sup>11</sup> There is a slight spelling discrepancy with the name Baršabbā Quč/Quča on the large meter-long “Petros Stone” found in 2014 with the green “Yoshmid Stone” found in 2017. However, as Dickens has pointed out, such misspellings are not unusual in the Zhetisu gravestone corpus. The highly unusual dual name and the provenance of the *kayraks* makes it quite likely that Baršabbā Quč and Baršabbā Quča are the same person. For an example of the name “Baršabbā” found on a Sassanid era seal which may demonstrate a Persian link with the first half of this dual name, see GYSELEN 2006, 17-78 as quoted in ASHUROV 2018, 257-295. The name Baršabbā and its variation Basava is found in among the collection of stones from modern Kyrgyzstan along with the dual name Baršabbā Mumin, see ZHUMANGULOV 2014, 27.

<sup>12</sup> The gravestone corpus in the Zhetisu region has a high proportion of gravestones with inscriptions naming priests, see DICKENS 2009, 13-49.

currently 81 exposed graves have revealed 32 adults and 49 children which provides a current child to adult ratio of 5 children to every 3 adults.

Results are still too preliminary to determine the reason for the large number of juveniles. The most logical explanation so far is the probable high infant mortality rate characteristic of the times, which is possibly borne out in our data since 33 out of the 49 juveniles excavated were 5 years old or younger, and, in a few instances, even stillborn infants. Further forensic investigations may provide a clearer picture as to the cause of death, however, excavators at other Christian burial sites have recorded a high number of infant burials as well. This seems characteristic of the change in burial practices as Christianity was adopted that placed a value on burying children when compared to pre-Christian cemeteries in similar locations that have fewer juvenile interments.<sup>13</sup>

Before comparing the Ilibalyk graves with the records of others in the Central Asian region, a description of the graves found at Ilibalyk is in order. The most consistent factor in 100% of the burials excavated to date at Ilibalyk is the west-to-east orientation of the body, meaning that the head was always placed on the west side and the feet to the east.<sup>14</sup> This proved true regardless of age, including at least one still-born child that appeared hastily interred almost on top of another small infant. Thirty-five percent of the bodies were buried with the head intentionally propped up to face the east. Additional interments might also have had their heads propped up, however, the decomposition or natural shifting of the soil rendered it impossible to interpret the posture in those cases.

In some instances, a small earthen “pillow” or heap of dirt was intentionally formed to place behind the head of the deceased to ensure that the mandible rested on the sternum with the face oriented in the direction of the rising sun. In one instance, a small square-shaped stone was included inside this earthen “pillow.” As far as it is known, nothing in the historical record has been found concerning Church of the East burial practices as to the reason behind this method of interment. However, both body orientation and raising the head to face the east seems characteristic of early Christian burials throughout the Mediterranean region dating from at least the 4<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>15</sup> The eschatological idea of Christ’s statement in the Gospel of Matthew 24:27 that “...as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” Thus, the head was oriented to witness Christ’s return in the east. Several of the interred adults had a more varied head position, with some with the visage to the north and in some cases the head may have shifted following burial. Regardless, the uniformity concerning directional placement of the body affirms continuity of burial practice related to the Christian community at Ilibalyk.

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<sup>13</sup> FOX-TRITSAROLI 2019, 116-117. See also HAAS 2014, 125-126.

<sup>14</sup> Two infant burials proved too decomposed to adequately determine body orientation.

<sup>15</sup> FOX-TRITSAROLI 2019, 109; SWEETMAN 2019, 519-520.

Positioning of the arms and hands during burial also appeared to follow a ritualistic pattern, particularly for children whose hands were purposely positioned with the arms bent to have the hands rest together at the waist. Teens and adults were buried with a wider variation of hand positions across the abdomen or thoracic region, but in only 3 cases (1 child and 2 adults or 4%) were the hands placed prone alongside the body.

### **Grave Goods and Their Significance**

The majority of graves excavated so far have contained no grave goods (82%). The items that have been found could be categorized three ways: jewelry; a small river stone, usually rectangular in shape; and/or a small potsherd. None of the graves contained all three types of goods. One grave, an adult female, contained elite items of jewelry and will be discussed below.

Nineteen of the graves (24%) contained small round or oblong river stones, which were usually placed in the hand or crook of the elbow, in some cases two or more stones were found. The majority of these finds were in children's tombs, but not exclusively. None of these small stones found with the body appeared to have any type of inscription and usually did not exceed 10 cm in length. Fourteen of the graves (18%) contained jewelry which were predominately beads to a necklace placed around a child's neck. Some may have been bracelets around the wrist, but discerning the difference proved difficult due to hand placement in the abdominal and thoracic regions. In at least one case, the beads appear to have been sewn onto the clothing or burial shroud of the deceased child. The beads themselves were often very tiny (1-2 mm) and made of glass paste. In a few cases, semi-precious stones, such as carnelian were also included. In one instance, an intricate necklace containing small bird bones with alternating turquoise-colored beads was found around the neck of an infant. In a few instances, thin bronze and silver rings which appear to have been part of a pendant attached to a necklace or possibly an earring, were found. These, in some cases contained a small freshwater pearl carefully attached to the earring loop by a thin copper wire. In one case, a silver ring was found around the finger of a child who appeared to be five or six years old.

Only 3 adult graves (9%) excavated so far have contained jewelry. One with a small stone, teardrop-shaped pendant, another with a single carnelian bead. Such finds appear consistent with other Christian cemeteries in a wide variety of contexts both in the West as well as within Central Asia.<sup>16</sup> One major exception are the exquisite jewelry pieces found on an adult female (aged 30 or older). This person, obviously of elite status was interred with 2 silver bracelets, 2 beaded bracelets which included semi-precious stones and ocean coral, 5 rings including

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<sup>16</sup> SWEETMAN 2019, 520. KOLCHENKO 2018, 48-103.

a gold ring with a large turquoise setting and gold filigree decoration typical of Turkic designs of the era, and a set of freshwater pearl earrings (fig. 5).



Fig. 5

Of special note were the apparent Christian symbols inscribed on the silver bracelets which appeared to match the silver ring on a raised bezel (fig 5). The symbol was that of what is often termed an almond-leaf rosette, due to the almond-shaped petals which appear in the foreground with an equilateral Bolnisi cross in the background. Art historian, Dr. Charles Stewart, a

member of the excavation team, prior to our discovery had already done significant study on this particular design which is found in Christian contexts, including church mosaics and décor, spanning from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century throughout Christendom.<sup>17</sup> The same design has also been found on jewelry in an Ongut tomb at Olon Sume. This site was the northern capitol of the Ongut, a tribe with Church of the East adherents in inner Mongolia and these bracelets with the rosette design date from the same time period as the elite woman buried at Ilibalyk (13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>18</sup> Other examples of jewelry with the almond-leaf rosette have been found within Kazakhstan itself, though in one case, the medieval city of Kayalyk, the grave was identified as a Muslim burial.<sup>19</sup> Stewart's theory concerning this rosette design seen in Christian contexts pertained to its optical illusion. Non-Christians, including those who might persecute Christians would see the rosette and view its floral motif, but alert Christians would be aware of the cross design as seen in the background.

A second ring also made of a silver alloy with an intricate series of raised plats which give it a braided appearance contained settings which may have held precious stones. It, too, is in a cruciform shape which could be interpreted as a flower, or a cross, or both. Given the context of this grave in conjunction with the four-leaf rosette design found on one of the rings and the 2 silver bracelets, religious symbolism for this ring cannot be ruled out.

The grave goods in this tomb provide further information besides this woman's connections to the symbols of the broader medieval Christian world. They also tell us that some within the Christian community at Ilibalyk were of elite status. This is further verified from the beaded bracelets which contained carnelian

<sup>17</sup> STEWART 2008, 98-105.

<sup>18</sup> DELACOUR 2005: 94.

<sup>19</sup> БАЙПАКОВ – ВОЯКИН 2007, 124-127; appendix 2, 70.

stones (indigenous to the region), quartz, glass beads, and also red coral (now bleached white due to the weathering in the grave) most probably from the Indian Ocean.<sup>20</sup> These Indian Ocean trade connections are also evident by the discovery of 3 cowrie shells at the cemetery, one *in situ* near the neck of an infant. Drill holes in all the shells indicate they were used as jewelry.<sup>21</sup> Also, a jewelry cache found by another excavation team headed by Karl Baipakov in 2018 in a niche of Ilibalyk's *shahristan*'s wall revealed an entire red coral necklace along with silver beads and bracelets contemporary with our finds in this grave.<sup>22</sup> So, the historical record of the expansion of trade along this northern branch of the Silk Road during the 12<sup>th</sup> through 14<sup>th</sup> centuries encompassing the period of the Mongolian empire is verified in the archaeological record at Ilibalyk both at its political center as well as among some in the Christian community.

### **Grave Construction and the Usage of Bricks**

The graves at the Ilibalyk Christian cemetery can all be considered “pit burials” which simply describes the process of digging a shaft and depositing the bodies then covering them with soil. The most recent excavations have allowed for the identification of four specific types. It is currently unknown whether the different types reflect a time progression or not, although this hypothesis is certainly under consideration. Radiocarbon analysis of two of the graves from different burial types suggests that this may be the case, however, the margin for error in the samples is not significant enough for that conclusion to be made.

The first type, a plain pit burial, involved depositing the body and covering the body with soil with no other associated construction. These burials were found closest to the surface and are most often associated with children's burials. However, due to the fact that the local soil was used in making the mudbrick found in the grave constructions, discerning the presence of brick in conjunction with a particular tomb is far from easy. In addition, some of these first types may have tamped the soil, known as *taipa* (Russian, *paksa*), once the soil covered the remains.

The second type are burials involved placing brick to cover the grave pit once a layer of soil had been deposited on the body. In most cases this was unfired mudbrick, with the exception of two graves, as will be mentioned below. Within

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<sup>20</sup> While the most famous red coral dating back, at least, to Roman times is found in the Mediterranean, it is probable that the coral found on the bracelets is one of two species found in the Indian Ocean, further analysis is necessary. See MORADI, 2016, 125-142.

<sup>21</sup> A recent examination of the role of cowrie shells as currency along the Silk Road and throughout Asia is found in YANG 2011, 1-25.

<sup>22</sup> BAIPAKOV - KAMALDINOV 2019.



this second type, there are four subtypes based on the way that the bricks were placed on the grave. The first subtype is a horizontally-placed mudbrick cover (fig. 6). After a narrow shaft the approximate width of the body was cut in the earth, a wider shaft was cut above these forming ledges on which the bricks were placed horizontally across the body which had been covered with a layer of soil. Once these bricks were placed, more soil was likely heaped on top of the grave with the brick covering. The second subtype varied only slightly with the bricks placed vertically along the ledges (fig. 7). These bricks were slightly larger in size than those from the horizontally-placed bricks and the western side of the grave usually had no brick placed over the skull. These bricks may have also been placed at a slant and then had soil placed on top of them. A third brick subtype involved placing either mudbrick or fired brick (of secondary usage) which were placed at an angle creating a gabled or steepled type roof once the pit was dug and the body interred. In one instance the bricks were placed on only the northern side of the grave with tamped earth on the south side.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

The third type of grave construction involved the placement of a wooden-lid covered pit. This type was found with only one grave at the Ilibalyk cemetery so far. As mentioned below, other Central Asian Christian burials have been discovered that contained full coffins. This type only had a wooden cover of interlocking boards as opposed to a box-style coffin. No nails were discovered with this cover, so the boards may have been laid loosely across the grave pit.

The fourth type of grave construction discovered, also only one example, was that of a niche burial. After digging a shaft, a niche was then dug into the northern side of the shaft to contain the full length of the body. Following interment, a wall of vertically-placed mudbrick then sealed this northern niche and the shaft to the south of the niche was then filled with soil.

Brick size varied considerably between graves, throughout the cemetery and the small amount of fired brick found within the cemetery has been of secondary usage, meaning that they were taken from other construction sites and buildings. This is known due to the fact that mortar residue has been found on the bricks that was not utilized in the grave construction itself. Size variation may indicate various time phases in burials, but the uniformity that is there suggests that builders utilized the Persian system of measurement with the basic unit of the *dva* (hands), which was about 10 cm.

Finally, fired bricks in some instances also appear to have been used as grave markers. Previous seasons had revealed crudely scratched crosses on ceramics, both pottery and fired brick, however no conclusion could be drawn as to whether deliberate “scratches” actually signified symbolic intent.<sup>23</sup> Then, during the 2018 excavations, a fired brick with a post-fired cross incision was found *in situ* alongside the grave of a child, presumably hastily created at the time of interment. Two other fired bricks with crude cross incisions were found within the cemetery as well with no apparent grave association. However, due to the *in situ* discovery, it can be logically assumed that these, too, were grave markers similar in purpose to the stone *kayraks* and their cross incisions as religious identity markers (fig. 8).

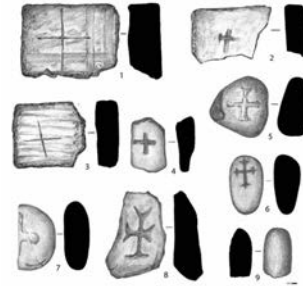


Fig. 8

### Evidence of Funerary Meals

Early in the process, excavators recognized the presence of ash pits throughout the area. These pits were often immediately next to or even on top of the grave, and, in some cases, adjacent to the skull. In several instances bovine bone fragments and potsherds from cookware were contained within the ash pits. While exact associations with specific graves proved difficult at times, at least 14% of the graves had known ash pits connected to the burial.

The presence of ash pits, cookware and domestic animal bones provide possible evidence for funerary meals occurring at the site of the burial. Unfortunately, there are no historical testimonies regarding the significance of such meals in this geographical context during the Middle Ages. Moreover, no known archaeological excavations of other Christian graves in Central Asia have recorded the presence of ash pits or funerary meals, although sheep remains have been found in at least one instance.<sup>24</sup>

While there is no known historical documentation, there is sufficient ethnographic records and parallel contemporary practices among Kazakhs, Kyrgyz and Uighurs in the Zhetisu region, as well as throughout Central Asia, that indicate a deep tradition. For example, commemorative meals for the

<sup>23</sup> It is possible that such “scratches” are a Christian form of *tamga* marks. *Tamgas* were identity marks on all forms of property, (livestock, ceramics, coins, etc.), throughout Central Asia dating back to the Bronze Age and lasting into the 19<sup>th</sup> century and can be symbols of identity for entire clans and/or religious groups. A recent significant study on *tamgas* has been released including an introductory overview and of *tamgas* and their use as possible religious identification, YATSENKO et al 2019, 19-21.

<sup>24</sup> SHISHKINA 1994, 56-63.

deceased occur on the third, seventh, and fortieth days. It is usually assumed that this custom was introduced to the Turkic tribes by Islam. One, however, should not ignore the contemporary funerary meal custom of the current Assyrian Church of the East, which commemorates the dead in the eucharistic liturgy on the same corresponding days as many Central Asian Muslims.<sup>25</sup> Until more ethnographic and anthropological research is conducted in this area, the source of the modern practice could be attributed to any of the major religions, including shamanism or any combination of syncretistic religious practice. The evidence from Ilibalyk now indicates another possible source in Christianity, of which there is a robust literature on the topic.<sup>26</sup>

### **Comparisons with Other Known Church of the East Burials**

Thanks to a fresh examination of the excavations of Nicholai Pantusov by Kyrgyzstani archaeologist Valery Kolchenko, we now know that Christian graves excavated near today's Bishkek in 1886 contained juveniles interred at shallower levels in comparison to adults. Pantusov reported that children's graves at Burana (medieval Balasagun) were found at a depth of 0.7 – 1.15 meters below the original surface whereas adult "standard" burials ranged from 1.6 to 2 meters below the surface. The children's graves at this location in Kyrgyzstan were also simple grave pits with no accompanying brick tombs, in contrast with several of the adult graves which contained brick with construction types similar to those revealed at Ilibalyk as seen in Pantusov's illustrations. If Pantusov's notes from southern Zhetisu (Semirechye) more than 130 years ago are accurate, then they provide comparable funerary practices with those currently revealed at Ilibalyk. Note that the Burana site is located approximately 450 kilometers to the southwest of Ilibalyk.<sup>27</sup>

Other individual Christian graves were excavated over the past several decades that come from the same era in Kyrgyzstan and their similar geographical spread and chronology provide further supporting evidence of widespread common interment practices. The archaeologist, Dr. Galina Shishkina reported the excavation of three graves in 1986 with one identified as that of a "warrior-priest" since the grave contained weapons as well as a metallic cross sewn onto the clothing. These tombs, located near Durmen, Uzbekistan, had the same west-to-east body orientation as those in Ilibalyk and a brick placed behind the skull so that the visage of the deceased faced east.<sup>28</sup> It should also be noted, however, that one distinct difference between the Ilibalyk graves discovered to date and those in both Durmen and Bishkek was the presence of wooden coffins in some

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<sup>25</sup> As confirmed in an email to the author from the Assyrian Church of the East Bishop Mar Awa Royel, June 6, 2019.

<sup>26</sup> For example, see the references in REBILLARD 2003.

<sup>27</sup> KOLCHENKO 2018, 48-103. See the original diaries of PANTUSOV 1886, 2a-31a.

<sup>28</sup> SHISHKINA 1994, 63.

instances.<sup>29</sup> As indicated above, the Ilibalyk cemetery has revealed only one wooden cover with no box-type coffins.

Pantusov noted the use of fired brick, and specifically provided drawings of tombs with a similar trapezoidal gabled configuration as two tombs found at Ilibalyk. Baipakov during his analysis of individual graves near the Taraz area, which he also identified as Christian, noted various brick configurations placed over these tombs. This included both a gabled roof configuration as well as rows of bricks over the length of graves in a horizontal pattern as also referenced above. In addition, he made a point to differentiate between these burials and those of Muslim graves in the same area which were oriented with the feet facing southwest, toward Mecca.<sup>30</sup>

Little evidence from these other excavations are found concerning the possibility of funerary meals, perhaps due to missing it in the archaeological context or in part to a thorough lack of knowledge to exactly what how the Turco-Persian Christians of Central Asia carried out their faith and practice in the medieval period. Archaeologists in the Central Asian context have at times puzzled over finding evidence which appears to “contradict Christian tradition.”<sup>31</sup> For example, the inclusion of weapons in a tomb and also sheep remains found next to the body of the supposed “warrior-priest”—as identified by Shishkina—may indicate possible syncretistic beliefs. Certainly, syncretism among medieval Turkic Christians cannot be ruled out. Such heterodox and syncretistic ideas are sometimes attested to by scholars in the Nestorian writings found in northwest China.<sup>32</sup> However, distinctions between theological interpretation and theological syncretism are not necessarily clear in the context of excavation in the same way that the examination of written texts might be.

### **The Anticipation of Dating, Forensic, and Laboratory Analysis**

The archaeological team at Ilibalyk has taken radiocarbon (C-14), forensic, and DNA samples from the human remains at various times throughout the excavations. Radiocarbon dating analysis margin for error can still only provide us a range of dates that the Christians of Ilibalyk probably lived and thrived. This is especially important since the gravestones found to date at Ilibalyk have provided no specific dating evidence. The C-14 analysis from 3 samples, one from a midden pit approximately 100 meters to the east of the cemetery and charcoal found in two graves provide a maximum date range spanning from 1217 to 1389 AD. Samples taken from two graves can slightly narrow this 172 year

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<sup>29</sup> KOLCHENKO 2018, 81; SHISHKINA 1994, 60.

<sup>30</sup> BAIPAKOV - TERNOVAYA 2018, 8-147.

<sup>31</sup> KOLCHENKO 2018, 82. See also SHISHKINA 1994, 63.

<sup>32</sup> BAUMER 2016a, 176-179, makes it clear, however, that not all the writings were syncretistic, in fact, at times they are quite polemical against ideas in Buddhism and Manichaeism related to corporeal resurrection.

period, yet still with a margin for error. The adult graves of the cemetery have provided dates ranging from the 1260s to the 1320s. It is thus safe to say that the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century is when the Christians of Ilibalyk lived along this northern trade route in today's southeast Kazakhstan. This is also consistent with the date ranges of Christians living throughout the Zhetisu/Semirechye region as recorded on those gravestones found more than a century ago.<sup>33</sup>

The analysis of ancient DNA taken from several of the skeletons are still awaiting processing. Cost restrictions and delays in forensic analysis have hindered the obtaining of results. Such analyses could provide significant understanding in the realm of possible pathology, specifically whether plague impacted the Christians of Ilibalyk, which is often regarded as one reason Church of the East Christians virtually disappeared from this region of Central Asia in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, among other reasons.<sup>34</sup>

DNA analysis would also solidify our understanding of exactly what ethnic markers the Christians in this community possessed. The gravestones provide us with Turkic, Persian, and Syriac (including biblical) names; DNA could clarify the ethnic identity and whether their progeny was perpetuated in the region even though the religious expression could no longer be found by the 15<sup>th</sup> century. It could also possibly shed light on whether the Ilibalyk Christians were from the Turco-Mongolian nomads such as the Naiman or Keraites, or if they were religious hold outs maintaining their faith despite possible opposition to their Karakhanid rulers, who were the first Turkic khanate to embrace Islam prior to the Mongolian invasion.

## Conclusion

The significant discovery of a Christian community at Ilibalyk from the late medieval period along the northern trade routes of the Zhetisu region of modern Kazakhstan is one more “piece of the puzzle” in the story of this obscure history. It demonstrates a continuity of religious and cultural expression spanning both the Chu and Ili River valleys located in today's Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Excavations at the cemetery, while still preliminary, provide a clear connection between the Church of the East adherents— as represented by the 34 gravestones (*kayraks*) with their cross iconography and written inscriptions— and the 82 bodies examined in the cemetery. The uniformity of interment practices, grave goods, and funerary meals provide sufficient evidence of a multi-generational, homogenous community of Christians that lived in this large city along the northern route of the Silk Road during the 12<sup>th</sup> through the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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<sup>33</sup> The date range for the *kayraks* found in modern Kyrgyzstan and in Almalyk (northwest China) during the Russian imperial period are from 1200 to 1345 AD and are designated according to the Seleucid calendar, see DICKENS 2009, 15.

<sup>34</sup> SLAVIN 2019, 59-90. SCHAMILOGLU 2017, 714-19.

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### Figure Captions:

Fig. 1. Map with location of medieval Ilibalyk, displayed in the context of modern and medieval cities Map by C.S. Stewart.

Fig. 2. Ilibalyk site in relation with modern Usharal (Ucharal) village in southeast Kazakhstan.

Fig. 3. Photos of 4 inscribed gravestones (*kayraks*) from Ilibalyk with translations from Old Turkic and Syriac. Translation by Mark Dickens. Photos by Archaeological Expertise, LLC.

Fig. 4. Drawings displaying True Cross or Calvary Cross imagery from 3 gravestones discovered at Ilibalyk. Drawings by Archaeological Expertise, LLC.

Fig. 5. Jewelry from locus 089 following cleaning and conservation. Two silver bracelets with four-leaf rosette motif, a silver ring with the same motif, one silver ring with cruciform flower design, one gold ring with turquoise stone and two beaded bracelets with stone, glass and coral beads. Photo by D. Sorokin, 2019.

Fig. 6. Horizontally placed mudbrick grave cover in Ilibalyk cemetery. Photo by S. Dulle, 2019.

Fig. 7. Vertically placed mudbrick grave cover in Ilibalyk cemetery. Photo by S. Dulle, 2019.

Fig. 8. Drawing of various cross-inscribed grave markers from Ilibalyk cemetery: 1-3: ceramic brick markers with incised crosses; 4-9: river stones with cross inscriptions. Drawings by Archaeological Expertise, LLC.





SITE SURVEYS OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES OF POTENTIAL  
RELEVANCE TO THE CHURCH OF THE EAST IN THE VICINITY OF  
KOILYK, KAZAKHSTAN  
(JUNE-OCTOBER, 2018)

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### **Introduction**

This report was first presented at the 6<sup>th</sup> Salzburg International Conference (in Almaty) on Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia in June, 2019. It summarized survey work done the previous summer and autumn (June-October) of 2018 at several archaeological sites of potential relevance to the history of the Church of the East. The surveys were performed by a team of students from Woodberry Forest School from Woodberry Forest, Virginia, and followed up with local interviews and additional surveys by a team with the Department of Nestorian Studies from the Kazakhstan National Academy of Sciences.<sup>1</sup> These surveys were conducted under the authority of the Archaeological Institute and Department of Nestorian Studies of the Kazakhstan National Academy of Sciences. Dr. Anthony J. Watson directed the efforts of the two survey teams, which also received guidance from Dr. Dmitriy Voyakin.

### **Koilyk (Qayaliq) in Medieval Persian and Latin Sources**

#### *Qayaliq and Early Mongol Conquests*

Owing to its geographical position commanding the surrounding territory, mountain passes, and steppes, in the long thirteenth century, the medieval city of Qayaliq appears to have been contested by several peoples as the competing interests of local rulers, the Khwarazm, and the Mongols played out in Greater Turkestan. Over the course of the period, several peoples were associated with city, including the Naiman, Qara Khitai, Qarluq, and Mongols. Administrative control generally passed over time from agents of the Qara Khitai *gür-khan*, such as the Qarluq Arslan-Khan, to various descendants of Chingiz Khan and their agents. The fluid political situation, with rising powers to both the East and West—and at times from both directions—meant the actual population of Qayaliq shifted in orientation as already nomadic populations were put to flight

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<sup>1</sup> The Woodberry Forest team comprised of Mack Izard, Karen Jordan, George Ladley, Ashby Shores, and Parker Watt. The Department of Nestorian Studies team comprised of Tyler Berry, Yura Mandro, Zachary Marsh and Aidar Zharkynbayev.

by warfare and the conquest of neighboring powers; nonetheless Qayaliq always appears to have remained Turkic.

Qayaliq is mentioned several times by the Persian historian Ata-Malik Juvaini in his *History of the World Conqueror* (*Tarikh-i Jahān-gushā*). Juvaini refers to the town and the surrounding territory as passing under the control of the Western Liao (Naiman-Qara Khitai) early in the thirteenth century. In c. 1208 CE, Küchlüg, the son of the deposed Naiman ruler Taibuqa, fled east after the Naimans were defeated by Chingiz Khan. Appealing to the *gür-khan* Yelü Zelugu, he stated, “My people are many; they are scattered throughout the region of the Emil, in Qayaligh [Qayaliq] and in Besh-Baligh; and everyone is molesting them. If I receive permission, I will collect them together and with the help of this people I will assist and support the *gür-khan*”<sup>2</sup> Thus, it appears that by this point, the Mongol push southwest had displaced some of the Naiman into Qara Khitai lands, where they remained as an unsettled, unprotected, and leaderless people. Significantly for the purposes of the Church of the East, the Naiman were Christian. The *gür-khan* granted Küchlüg his boon, and the newly invested leader soon rose in rebellion. Qayaliq is used as a geographic reference point for Juvaini in describing the events around the rebellion of Küchlüg against his then father-in-law Yelü Zelugu in 1210-1211.<sup>3</sup> After short but colorful career that saw him “turn idolater...and to abjure his Christianity,” and persecuting Muslims along the southern trade routes from Amaligh to Khotan, Küchlüg was defeated by Mongol forces in a series of engagements between 1216 and 1218 CE.<sup>4</sup>

Juvaini later relates that Qayaliq is ruled by the titular Arslan-Khan of the Qarluqs who, after his father runs afoul of the *gür-khan*, in c. 1218 “made his way to the court Chingiz Khan, where he was received with mark of special consideration and favour...he was sent back to Qayaligh [Qayaliq] and ...received a royal maiden in marriage. And when Chingiz Khan marched against the [Khwarazm] Sultan’s empire, he joined him with his men and rendered great assistance.”<sup>5</sup> Related to this passage, Juvaini wrote that in c. 1219 CE, Qayaliq was again valued as a strategic point of confluence between regional powers, when it served as a rally point for the armies of Chingiz Khan on their way to prosecute their campaign against the Khwarazm Sultan.<sup>6</sup> Vasily Barthold estimates that between 150,000 to 200,000 men passed through Qayaliq on their way southward to Otrar at this time, representing the combined forces of the Mongols and the “veteran warriors” of Suqnaq-taqin of Amaligh, the followers of the Uighur Idīqūt Bāwurchiq of Besh-Baligh, and the mustered troops of above-mentioned Arslan-Khan. The host was apparently enormous, even by exaggerated contemporary

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<sup>2</sup> JUVAINI in BOYLE (tr.) 1997, 63.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 63-64.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-66; LANE 2004, 41.

<sup>5</sup> JUVAINI in BOYLE (tr.) 1997, 75-77.

<sup>6</sup> BARTHOLD 2012 (repr.), 362n., 403-4; JUVAINI in BOYLE (tr.) 1997, 82.

standards: before the walls of Otrar, the “plain had become a tossing sea of countless hosts and splendid troops, while the air was full of clamour and uproar from the neighing of the armoured horses and the roaring of mail-clad lions.”<sup>7</sup> Ghayir-Khan of Otrar is reputed to “have bit the back of his hand in amazement at the unexpected sight.”<sup>8</sup> After a siege of over five months, the campaign was a success, and the final remnants of the Otrar garrison capitulated.<sup>9</sup> The assistance of the Qarluqs placed Arslan-Khan’s reputation in good stead with the Mongols, and Juvaini relates that even during the reign of Chingiz’s grandson Möngke, descendants of Arslan-Khan continued to be held in “high honour.”<sup>10</sup>

### *Qayaliq under the Mongols*

Qayaliq is mentioned again as a city of strategic value by Juvaini when Chingiz Khan divides his empire. Juvaini wrote, “When during the reign of Chingiz Khan the kingdom became of vast extent, he assigned everyone his place of abode...to his eldest son Tushi [Jochi], he gave the territory stretching from the regions of Qayaliq...to [the lands of the Volga Bulgars] and as far in that direction as the hoof of Tartar hoof had penetrated...” lands which were to become the Golden Horde.<sup>11</sup> In this instance, Qayaliq, held by Chaghatai, commanded the lands forming a political boundary between Chaghatai’s Khanate and Jochi’s lands.

Qayaliq is again mentioned as falling under the Chaghatai Khanate upon the death of Chingiz Khan. In *The Successors of Genghis Khan*, Rashid al-Din notes in “624 /1226-7, Chingiz Khan...passed away in the region of the Tangqut...For nearly two years throne and kingdom were deprived of a king... It was therefore advisable to make haste in the matter of the accession to the Khanate...From [Qayaliq] came Chaghatai Khan with all his sons and grandsons.”<sup>12</sup>

By the 1230’s CE, Qayaliq fell under the expansive rule of Ögödei Khan (d. 1241), and was governed by Mahmud Yalavach, a Sogdian Muslim originally from Bukhara who had originally served under the Kharazmian regime.<sup>13</sup> Yalavach had played a pivotal role in the embassies between the Kwarazmshah and Chingiz Khan. Yalavach is a prime example of the type of administrator that rose through Mongol ranks, serving under two regimes as an administrator, merchant, and advisor to the Khan. The absorption of the Uighur and Qara Khitai into the Mongol empire had helped transform it, establishing a broad tax base among people with common origins, customs, and culture with the Mongols. In addition, the Qara Khitai had already begun the transition from their nomadic

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<sup>7</sup> JUVAINI in BOYLE (tr.) 1997, 83.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 83-86.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>12</sup> RASHID AL-DIN in BOYLE (tr.) 1971, 29-30.

<sup>13</sup> RASHID AL-DIN in BOYLE (tr.) 1971, 94; DE HARTOG 1989, 85.

origins to an organized state, and were thus able to furnish their new Mongol rulers with officials experienced in statecraft, taxation, and administration. Yalavach, who would go on to serve as mayor of Taitu, was noted for introducing a census and reforming taxation.<sup>14</sup>

In 1252, Qayalīq is noted to be “an appanage of Ögödei’s grandson Qaidu,” and yet with Möngke’s ascension to the throne in 1251 CE, a general purge began and “the majority of the descendants of Ögödei and Chaghatai were killed or exiled to the front in China, and their subjects and pasturelands were redistributed, mainly to Batu and his brothers.”<sup>15</sup> It is not therefore surprising that Rashid al-Din reports that between 1251 and 1280 CE, Qayalīq served as a base within the *nerge* of Qonqīran Oghul, fourth son of Orda, who was Jochi’s eldest son. Jochi, of course was Chingiz Khan’s eldest son, and founder of what would become the Golden Horde. Rashid al-Din describes Qonqīran’s *nerge* as extending from Qayalīq “to the confines of Otrar.”<sup>16</sup> The *nerge* was a combination of hunting grounds and extended hunt, but in practice it held a much greater significance. The *nerge* was divided into groups of ten, hundreds, and thousands, and Chingiz Khan had said that, “the hunting of wild beasts was a proper occupation for the commanders of armies; and that instruction and training therein was incumbent on warriors...”<sup>17</sup> In essence, these hunts were the war games of the Mongol Empire, where warriors trained in scouting, discipline, tactics, horsemanship, and archery. It was where they developed unit cohesion, learned to ignore hardship, and familiarized themselves with the terrain, all while stalking a quarry that could just as easily be an enemy army.

By 1294 CE, the lands around Qayalīq had once again changed hands, this time landing within the family of Qubilai (d. 1294). Upon Qubilai’s death his grandson, Temür (d. 1307), ascended to the Khanate. Rashid al-Din notes he in turn sent his brother Kammala to Karakorum, placing the armies of that region under his command, as well as the placing him in administrative control of “the Chinas, the Shiba’uchi, the Onan-and Kelüren, the Kem-Kemchi’üt, the Selenge and Qayalīq as far as the region of the Qīrgīz.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, while control over Qayalīq was exchanged between the various controlling branches of Chingiz’s line—first to Chaghatai, then to Ögödei, and finally to the descendants of Jochi and Qubilai—it is clear from its use as a political and geographical reference point that it maintained significance throughout the thirteenth century.

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<sup>14</sup> LANE 2004, 41. ALLSEN 1981, 32-53.

<sup>15</sup> JACKSON 1990, 148, n.1; id., 2005, 115.

<sup>16</sup> RASHID AL-DIN in BOYLE (tr.) 1971, 214.

<sup>17</sup> JUVAINI in BOYLE (tr.) 1997, 27.

<sup>18</sup> RASHID AL-DIN in BOYLE (tr.) 1971, 322.

*Christians in Qayaliq*

As mentioned, Qayaliq was a significant city owing to its strategic command over the surrounding region. It stood sentinel to the approach to Alakol lake from the West and the Dzungarian Gate to the East. The Dzungarian Gate allowed travelers to skirt north along the Dzungarian Alatau mountains as it links the windswept steppes in the West with the grassy northern route around the Taklamakan in the East. As a result of the easy grazing to be found along this route on approach from the East, and its opening up into steppe once through the pass, the Dzungarian Gate was a prime route of nomadic migration westwards. It is this aspect which likely led to Christian Naiman populations migrating and settling in the regions around Qayaliq and Besh-Baligh in the early thirteenth century.<sup>19</sup> As described above, it is these populations which were unified into Küchlüg's army, and it is likely that these people were among the Christian populations reported by William of Rubruck near Qayaliq approximately thirty years later.

The Franciscan William of Rubruck spent 12 days in "Cailac" in November 1253, on his outbound passage to Karakorum. Rubruck provides some good details of the city that had not been present in earlier accounts, and he describes a "large town...containing a market to which merchants resorted in large numbers."<sup>20</sup> He described his approach to the town from the West: "we emerged onto a very beautiful plain, to the right of which lay large mountains (the Dzungarian Alatau) and to its left a sea or lake fifteen days' journey in circumference (Lake Balkhash)." He continued that:

...this plain is entirely irrigated, as much as one could desire, by the streams that flow down from the heights, all of which discharge themselves into that sea...there used to be sizeable towns lying in the plain, but they were for the most part completely destroyed so that the Tartars could pasture there, since the area affords very fine grazing lands.<sup>21</sup>

At the time of Rubruck's arrival, Qayaliq was "largely Turcoman."<sup>22</sup> Rubruck reports three Buddhist temples in Qayaliq, along with "Nestorians and Saracens intermingled." In one of these temples he encounters a man with a tattooed cross on his hand, who takes to be Christian. W. Rockhill has noted that crosses and Buddhist swastikas are sometimes tattooed on hands by Mongols and Tibetans, and quotes an instance of sixth-century Turks tattooing crosses on their foreheads to protect from plague.<sup>23</sup> Rubruck also mentions the "Uighurs, who form a sect distinct from the rest."<sup>24</sup> Rubruck castigates the local Nestorians as "ignorant",

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<sup>19</sup> JUVAINI in BOYLE (tr.), 63; GROUSSET 1970, xxi-xxviii.

<sup>20</sup> RUBRUCK in JACKSON (tr.) 1990, 148; VAN DEN WYNGAERT 1929, XXII:7.

<sup>21</sup> RUBRUCK in JACKSON (tr.) 1990, 147.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 150, n. 3.

<sup>24</sup> VAN DEN WYNGAERT 1929, XXIV: 1, 4.

following Muslim customs, and plagued with “faulty doctrine,” a state to which they had fallen as these communities only received episcopal visitations “hardly once in fifty years.”<sup>25</sup> Of particular interest to the site surveys described in this paper, Rubruck mentions joyfully visiting a Nestorian church “three leagues away” (approximately 16.5 km) in a “settlement which was entirely Nestorian.”<sup>26</sup> It is this region in which the site surveys of this paper have taken place.

In one final note of topographical interest, pushing eastwards for three days, Rubruck gained the far reaches of this territory at Alakol Lake. He then proceeded to the southeast, noting, “a valley came down from among the high mountains in a region to the south-east, and there among the mountains lay another large lake (Lake Ebi), while a river ran through the valley from this lake (Ebi) to the first one (Alakol).” Even Rubruck felt the extreme winds of this area were worth noting: “Such a gale blows almost incessantly through the valley that people when passing are in great danger of the wind carrying them into the lake.”<sup>27</sup>

As shown, Qayaliq receives several mentions in various accounts from the thirteenth century. A vibrant, diverse merchant community of Naiman, Qara Khitai, Uighur, Sogdian, Mongol, and Tibetan peoples, with various sects of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, an image emerges of Qayaliq that is not quite in the center of things, and yet noteworthy enough to demarcate boundaries. It is here that multiple faiths contended with one another: Muslims scandalized by Buddhists, various sects of Christianity frowning over the practices of the other. Of course, it was here that William of Rubruck also describes a church, the location of which remains unknown and which this survey has tried to identify potential locations for. Given the history, it is an intriguing probability that the Nestorian community reported by Rubruck may have been Qarluq or Naiman.

### **Site Surveys in the Vicinity of Koilyk (Qayaliq)**

Between June and October 2018, two teams performed site surveys and interviews of archeological sites of interest in Koilyk (Qayaliq) and surrounding regions. Initially using satellite imagery, teams from Woodberry Forest School and the Department of Nestorian Studies of the Archaeological Institute of the Kazakhstan National Academy of Science identified several sites of interest near modern Koilyk. Sites within an approximate radius of three leagues (as specified by William of Rubruck), or under a conservative 20 kilometers from Koilyk, were prioritized.

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<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, XXVI: 12.

<sup>26</sup> VAN DEN WYNGAERT 1929, XXVII: 1.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, XXVII: 2; RUBRUCK in JACKSON (tr.) 1990, 165

Koilyk itself has been excavated in part by prior expeditions, starting with a 1964 expedition led by Professor K.M. Baypakov, which dug several pits and developed an initial plan of the medieval settlement. Study resumed only in 1998, which yielded a Buddhist Temple, a feature described by Rubruck. In 1999-2000, work was performed in the southeastern part of the settlement, which may have yielded the home of a wealthy resident. Further excavations in 2001, 2002-2003, 2004, and 2005 yielded a bathhouse (hammam), further temples (including one potentially of “Manichaean” origin), a mosque, as well as further conservation work on existing structures and studies of the site stratigraphy.

The city was surrounded by walls, which, typical to structures in the area, form an irregular quadrilateral. The corners of the walls align generally with the cardinal points, and the northeast wall is reported to be about 1200m, the southwest wall about 750m. Circular towers were observed every 30 to 45m. In the western corner, a square shaped mound 70x80m and a height of approximately 4.5m was reported, with entrances on the northwest, northeastern, and southeastern sides. A quadrangular *shakhristan* was also reported.

From satellite imagery, three significant sites of interest were determined as the focus of the 2018 expedition. In June of 2018 a team from Woodberry Forest explored sites near Tashudyk, near Bakaly, a town to the East of Koilyk (Site 1 and 1 B). Another site (Site 2 A, B and C) north of Bakaly, with multiple points of interest, including an intriguing “cross” or “swastika” structure, *kurgan*, and a *shakhristan*, were surveyed. Additionally, a large *shakhristan* in Qazybaev, southeast of Bakaly, was recorded. In October 2018, a fellow on team from the Department of Nestorian Studies was sent to these sites and to houses surrounding medieval Koilyk to interview villagers about any items that might have been found in the past decades.<sup>28</sup>

## Site Summaries

### Site 1: South side of Taskudyk, northeast of Bakaly, located at 45.7025, 80.1362

Site 1 is a *shakhristan* located approximately 150 to 200m south of the town of Taskudyk, northeast of Bakaly and northwest of Kakimzhan and Koilyk (Fig. 1). The site is a quadrangular *shakhristan*. The walls are adobe brick, between 2 and 2.5m in height, approximately 4 to 5m in width, with a worn pathway along the top and aligned along a north-south axis. The north and south walls are approximately 175m in length. The eastern wall is approximately 150m in length. The west facing wall is approximately 165m in length. The *shakhristan* presents a central mound in a rough quadrangular shape with some evidence of decay

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<sup>28</sup> MARSH 2018



standing at roughly 1.5 to 2m above the infill within the *shakhristan* walls. The dimensions of this mound are roughly 30m east to west by 53m north to south. A sinkhole was located in in this mound but not explored, potentially evidence of the collapse of structures below ground level, or of disturbance from the surface by unidentified parties. Initial teams found clay pottery in a pit in the southwest corner, but also found the recent skeletal remains of a canine, so no reliable indicator of age could be determined. Additional pottery shards and brick were found on the ground approximately 15 to 20m southeast of the southeast corner of the *shakhristan*. The owner of the field reported finding several pieces of pottery he had found while digging an irrigation trench in his field, south of the *shakhristan*, at approximately 45.7008, 80.1389.



Fig.1

Returning to Site 1 (Fig. 1) in October 2018, our teams spoke with multiple residents. Most people simply pointed to Site 1, and confirmed that various artifacts had been found there, although no record of what was found existed. When we tried to confirm a description of items found one resident enthusiastically confirmed finding things like bowls, including metal bowls.

However, he suggested that in the past, if anyone had anything of value, and especially metal wares, they were sold off during the economic collapse of the Soviet Union.

He took us to Site 1/B (45.7067, 80.1424) at the east end of Taskudyk, currently a burial site (Fig. 2). Along the way, he recruited other residents of Taskudyk who enthusiastically confirmed childhood stories of finding things. While at Site 1/B, we were shown bricks, some animal bones, etc. that were all similar to foundational pieces at the original Koilyk site closest to the main road. The men recalled that in childhood, there was a hill or mound that was



Fig.2

actually high enough to ski. They are unsure of the exact reason for the hill being levelled, but currently there is a graveyard in its place. Given the amount of disturbance at this site and the presence of a graveyard which makes excavation unlikely, it is doubtful that much else of value can be learned.

## Site 2: Northwest of Bakaly, at approximately 45.7722, 80.0896

### Site 2A- *Kurgans* (Fig. 4)

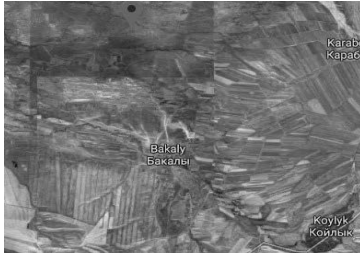


Fig.3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

Site 2 (Fig. 3) is a complex with multiple features of interest. It is located approximately 7.25km northwest of Taskudyk and Site 1, and approximately 18.8 km northwest of Koilyk. In June 2018 the Woodberry Forest team surveyed this site. The above ground features of Site 2 are generally aligned on an east-west axis approximately 1.2km from end to end. On the extreme eastern end of the complex are two mound shaped *kurgans*, located at 45.7565, 80.0977 (Fig 4.) These *kurgans* are approximately 4m in height, 15m in diameter, and spaced approximately 30m apart from one another along the east-west axis of the complex.

### Site 2B- Unknown Structure, designated “Cross” or “Swastika”

Located about 205m southwest of the westernmost *kurgan* are a series of trenches and elongated raised structures that present in satellite and aerial imagery as a large “cross” or “swastika” (Figs. 5 and 6). This cross-shaped structure has a rough midpoint at 45.7558, 80.0932. Proceeding westwards, there is a raised structure, called for clarification here the eastern arm, approximately 5m in height, 4m in width and 117m long. To the north of this eastern arm there is a large trapezoidal depression approximately 30m by 50m that may indicate further structures. A long trench approximately 134m long and 10m wide runs along the southern edge of this eastern arm, where it is bisected by the southern semi-transsept of the transept, described below. A further raised structure then rises south of this trench with roughly the same dimensions as the eastern arm. Both

structures are bisected by a 12m wide trench that runs approximately 105m along a north-south axis to form the eastern side of the transept of the “cross” structure.

The transept of this “cross” runs 87m on a north-south axis that bisects both the eastern and western arms. It is separated from both arms by trenches to either side that are approximately 12m wide. It presents roughly the same characteristics as both arms: it is approximately 5m in height and 4m in width. The transept forms the midpoint of the “cross” at 45.7558, 80.0932, but is slightly oriented towards the east. This midpoint is approximately 570m from the southeast corner of the *shakhristan*, described below. On the southernmost end of southern semi-transept, an arm of about 12m runs to the east to bisect the easternmost trench on its southernmost point and connect with the structure to the south of the trench described above. This arm is also about 4m in width.

The western arm of the “cross” runs approximately 131m along the east-west axis. As with the eastern arm, it is approximately 5m in height and 4m in width. It is oriented approximately one metre further northwest at its southeasternmost corner and 21m further northwest at its southwesternmost corner than the eastern arm; it is unclear at this point whether this is due to settling or by design. South of the western arm, the trench continues, following its northwesterly orientation for 136m. At the westernmost end of this southern trench a narrow diagonal trench cuts southwest for 30m and empties into a small irregular depression approximately 15m by 21m.

A trench also runs to the north of the western arm, starting approximately 30m west of the easternmost point of the arm and continuing for approximately 111m. This northern trench is shallower and less wide than the other observable trenches in this “cross” structure, running approximately 2 to 3m deep and 9m wide. It is possible this variance is due to settling or collapse. The northern and southern trenches connect at the far western end of the western arm.

In between Site 2B and Site 2C, there is a raised mound with several observable depressions that runs to west of the “cross.” This mound runs westwards for 122m until it is bisected by another 152m long trench running along a north-south axis. This trench is again between 4 and 5m deep and approximately 12m wide. The trench curves to the west at its southernmost point, where it empties into an area of depressions approximately 50m by 20m. This was unexplored.

#### *Site 2C- Shakhristan*

Located 120 to 130m west of the intermediate trench between Sites 2B and 2C, is a large irregularly shaped quadrangular *shakhristan* constructed of adobe brick. This *shakhristan* is surrounded by a moat 12 to 15m wide. The walls are roughly aligned with the cardinal points and show evidence of round towers at all corners and midpoints in the southern, western, and northern walls. The eastern wall

shows evidence of a gatehouse at its midpoint and appears to have been flanked by round towers to its north and south along the wall. The southeast corner of the *shakhristan* facing Koilyk is located at approximately 45.7552, 80.0869. The southern wall is approximately 167m in length, the northern and southern walls are approximately 175m, and the eastern wall—the longest—is approximately 182m long. A test pit was dug next to the northern round tower inside the eastern wall to a depth of 1.5 meters. It yielded pottery shards, including the base of a bowl tentatively dated to the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, that were turned in to the Department of Nestorian Studies and the Archaeological Institute of the Kazakhstan National Academy of Sciences for further cataloging and study.

In October 2018, the team from the Department of Nestorian Studies interviewed the farmer who owns the land at the site. He reported finding human remains inside the corner of the structure at 45.7557, 80.0901 some of which were relocated roughly 70°NE at 45.7722, 80.0898. This site was particularly interesting considering its location amid multiple structures of varying shapes and sizes, as well as the confluence of nearby water sources. A return expedition was planned for the 2020 excavation season but delayed to 2022 due to COVID-19.

### **Conclusions: William of Rubruck's Lost Church?**

Not described in this paper is another site in Qazybaev, roughly 6km southeast of Bakaly, located approximately at 45.6780, 80.1476. There is another large *shakhristan* here bisected by the road between Koilyk and Bakaly. Adobe bricks are visible on the southern wall, which is currently threatened and collapsing into the nearby stream. In June 2018, the Woodberry Forest team interviewed a local shepherd from Qazybaev here who described how as a child he found a small metallic horse figurine at the base of the southern wall, but that he no longer has possession of it. In October 2018 the Department of Nestorian Studies team interviewed two shepherds, including the son of the shepherd mentioned above, and other villagers, who also confirmed over the years, children had found many items, but that most had been lost or sold. Beyond the horse, and descriptions of spoons and coins, no description of these items remains. A smaller *shakhristan* was also found at the coordinates 45.6908, 80.1142, south of Bakaly.

From the perspective of the study of the Church of the East, the study of Koilyk (Qayaliq) and its surrounding region offers some intriguing points of interest. William of Rubruck located a church of the Church of the East within 20km of Koilyk, as well as describing the approaches to the town. The site surveys conducted in 2018 illuminated several encouraging potential sites for William of Rubruck's church. In particular, Site 2 described above, northwest of Bakaly, presents several interesting and promising sites worth further study. The "cross" at Site 2B is particularly of interest. While the outbreak of COVID-19 has delayed

a further study of the site for now, there are plans to return in the excavation season of 2022. Such study will undoubtedly yield further understanding of the complex interactions that occurred in this part of Turkestan. It is clear that the region to the east of modern Koilyk had multiple settlements in the long thirteenth century, and that some were sizeable. While the exact location of Rubruck's church remains thus far unknown, the possibility of its discovery is tantalizingly close.

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# THE CROSSES OF SHIZHUZILIANG: TRACKING DOWN EIGHT CHRISTIAN GRAVESTONES AND A MARBLE BASE

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## Introduction

In 1891, a Belgian missionary journal on China and the Congo announced the discovery in northern China of a Christian cemetery with a number of stone columns and slabs decorated with cross depictions.<sup>2</sup> The objects had been documented and sketched by CICM<sup>3</sup> missionary César de Brabander during his two visits to the cemetery. Though de Brabander did not identify the cemetery by name, we now know that the site was located at Shizhuziliang (石柱子梁) in today's northern Chinese province of Hebei (河北).

Over three decades later, in 1922, another missionary bulletin associated with CICM published an article on the region with the cemetery, this time by Rafaël Verbrugge. Importantly, Verbrugge, who had surveyed the region in 1906, identified the site as “Cheu-dzou-ze-leang.” The article came with two maps: one in French and the other in Chinese, outlining the region – including the locality of the cemetery – and giving the Chinese characters for “Cheu-dzou-ze-leang” as 石柱子梁.<sup>4</sup>

Two years later, in 1924, a third missionary bulletin published two letters by CICM missionary Charles Pieters regarding the cemetery. The letters were illustrated with various photographs and a paper rubbing of the Christian tombstones.<sup>5</sup> That same year, Pieters guided American diplomat Samuel Sokobin to the cemetery and its tombstones. The visit resulted in a fourth primary source publication, this time in an American foreign service monthly, with further important photographs and descriptions of the objects.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Dr. Mark Dickens for proofreading and editing, as well as Ulli Herold for her comments and Map 3. All remaining mistakes are those of the author's.

<sup>2</sup> DE BRABANDER 1891.

<sup>3</sup> *Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae*, or “Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.”

<sup>4</sup> VERBRUGGE 1922. I am most grateful to Dr. Dirk Van Overmeire for providing access to this rare article.

<sup>5</sup> PIETERS 1924a and PIETERS 1924b.

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Dr. Hidemi Takahashi for alerting me to Sokobin's publications and sharing his forthcoming publication (TAKAHASHI 2021) with me.

Following the initial discovery of the Christian grave stones and the cemetery, the publications revealed that a number of the tombstones had been moved from the cemetery to Pieter's missionary post and the courtyard of a local Christian by the name of "Joan-Fou." Further stones were said to have been relocated by Buddhist monks and unknown treasure seekers.

In their respective publications, de Brabander, Verbrugge, Pieters and Sokobin speculated whether the tombstones originated from members of the Catholic Church or, in their words, "Nestorian heretics," i.e. followers of the Church of the East in China.

Further remarks on the site and the tombstones, along with reproductions of the images and documentation by de Brabander, Verbrugge, Pieters and Sokobin have been published by various scholars of the Church of the East in China, including the current author.<sup>7</sup>

Regrettably, the current whereabouts of the objects remain unknown. This means that our understanding of these objects is limited to the publications of the primary source documentation by de Brabander, Verbrugge, Pieters and Sokobin. Following decades of inattention, the nine stones have received some renewed interest, though a thorough examination of the objects and their potential whereabouts is still lacking.<sup>8</sup>

This article provides an overview of the discovery, documentation and interpretation of the objects, as well as the identification of a number of published reproductions. In addition, the article makes some observations on the various locations mentioned in relation to the cemetery and its objects. It also presents tentative interpretations regarding the religious traditions from which these objects likely originated. As some of the early publications of the stones are difficult to access, this article provides an organized reproduction of all primary source documentation of the nine objects (see the section entitled **Objects** below). In so doing, it synthesizes the information provided in the Dutch, French and English language source publications on the Christian gravesite of Shizhuziliang and its tombstones. Finally, some suggestions are made regarding further examination of the objects and their potential whereabouts.

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<sup>7</sup> I have discussed and reproduced images of objects from Shizhuziliang in HALBERTSMA 2015, 75-81 and Appendix 2.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance, TAKAHASHI 2021. For a recent publication with reinterpretations of original photography of most probably PIETERS 1924a, see CHEN ET AL 2020, 261-262, fig. 2 and 3. Regrettably, the information on origins and reinterpretation of images in this contribution is most limited.

### Documentation by César de Brabander

The discovery and first documentation of the stones were undertaken by the Belgian missionary César de Brabander (1857-1919) of the CICM. De Brabander, a Scheutist<sup>9</sup> who went by the Chinese name Pang Xiao Ai,<sup>10</sup> had arrived in 1882 in China, to be eventually stationed at the missionary post of “Hing-hwa-tsung” in today’s Hebei province.

De Brabander’s contribution to the history of the cemetery and its tombstones came in the form of a letter, dated 1 September 1890 and published in the monthly journal of his order in 1891. CICM published two versions of its journal: one in Dutch under the title *Missiën in China en Congo* (hereafter DV) and one in French entitled *Missions en Chine et aux Congo* (hereafter FV). It must be noted that the two language versions of de Brabander’s letter differ to some extent in terms of both terminology and contents. De Brabander’s mission station, for instance, is listed as “Hing-hwa-tsung” (DV) and “Hing-Hoa-t’cheng” (FV). In general, however, the two versions do not contradict each other and can thus be read as complementary.<sup>11</sup> To avoid confusion, I will reference which version of the journal I have used when relevant.<sup>12</sup>

In his three-page letter of 1890, de Brabander reported on the daily events and developments at his post and on a visit to the nearby ruined city of “Tchagan balgason” or “White City.” The second half of the letter is dedicated to his actual discovery and documentation of the Christian gravestones and cemetery.

De Brabander reported that he had received several accounts of a “Christian grave” located in the steppes some “four hours” from his post or, according to the FV, 5 *lieues* northeast of his residence.<sup>13</sup> According to his source, who had visited the site “a year earlier” (i.e. in 1889), the site had been marked by a large white marble cross measuring some five feet in height and inscribed with “European characters.” The caption published with de Brabander’s sketches mentions that the “Chinese foot equals 32 centimeters.”<sup>14</sup>

Visiting the area, de Brabander and his two Christian companions did not encounter the white marble cross, but instead identified a cemetery with stone

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<sup>9</sup> Due to the mission’s headquarters near the Scheutveld in Belgium, CICM would become known as “Scheut” and its missionaries as “Scheutisten”.

<sup>10</sup> VAN OVERMEIRE ET AL 2008, 95.

<sup>11</sup> It is not clear to me in which language de Brabander originally wrote his letter.

<sup>12</sup> For HALBERTSMA 2008 and HALBERTSMA 2015, I have used the Dutch language version, including the reproduction of the illustrations and related captions.

<sup>13</sup> De Brabander’s *lieue* (“league” in English) is an old French unit for distance, referring to the distance one can travel by foot in an hour. Curiously, the FV reveals that de Brabander actually travelled to the cemetery on horseback rather than on foot.

<sup>14</sup> DE BRABANDER 1891b, 411.



columns. The cemetery was situated on a hill and measured some *drij dagwant*, equivalent to one hectare.<sup>15</sup> De Brabander noted that “seven tombstones” remained in one piece, each measuring some seven to eight feet in height, two feet in width and one foot in depth. Each of the stones featured a cross, *le signe de la rédemption* (FV), in various styles. Below the cross depictions, images of flowers or a vase on a table were hewn.

De Brabander estimated that the site had contained some thirty graves and wondered if these were the tombs of Chinese, Mongol or European followers of the Catholic Church, or indeed tombs of “Nestorian heretics” at the Mongol court “from the days of William of Rubruck, envoy of Saint Louis the King of France.”<sup>16</sup> Considering the weathering of some of the stones, de Brabander contemplated that the stones appeared to be well over 1,000 years old. Compared to these tombstones, de Brabander noted that the “gravestones of Jesuits who passed at Beijing at the time of King Louis XIV seemed to be new.” Describing how certain depictions on standing stones were completely eroded by the elements, whereas those stones that had fallen on the engraved sides had clear engravings, including cross depictions “one thumb above the stone’s surface” (i.e. in high relief), de Brabander concluded that the stones must have been “centuries old.”<sup>17</sup>

Not having encountered the white marble cross during his initial visit, de Brabander returned to the site three days later for a second visit. This time he was guided by a Mongolian who reported to have seen the white marble cross four or five times. According to the DV, the guide indicated the “precise location” where the white marble cross had once stood at the cemetery. Interestingly, the FV identified this location as a white marble base (*soubassement* or “foundation”), a documented object discussed further below. During this second visit, a number of local Mongolians gathered and informed de Brabander that a year earlier (i.e. in 1889), the lamas of the Buddhist monastery “Poro osom sume”, or “Grey Water Monastery” (DV),<sup>18</sup> had relocated all white marble stones for construction. The material reportedly included some ten tombstones depicting crosses and the white marble cross.

Concluding his letter, de Brabander remarked that if the monks would hand over the white marble cross, he would condone the “theft” of the other tombstones. As

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<sup>15</sup> In the DV, de Brander uses the Flemish surface unit *dagwant* – *drij* being a Dutch dialect term for the number “three” – referring to the surface a farmer can plough with a horse or oxen in one day. One *dagwant* corresponds to ca. 0.3 hectares. The FV refers to *un hectare* (“one hectare”).

<sup>16</sup> HALBERTSMA 2015, 77 erroneously refers here to Montecorvino. This suggestion was actually made by SOKOBIN 1925, 103.

<sup>17</sup> DE BRABANDER 1891b, 412.

<sup>18</sup> The designation “Grey Water Monastery” is only provided in the DV. The FV refers to “Poro-oson-soumé”.

for the cemetery itself, de Brabander said that “he had not made up his mind.” Here, in the closing paragraphs of his letter, the Dutch and French language versions of the journal differ even more significantly.

In the DV, de Brabander contemplated the possibility that, since the cemetery was Christian, the ownership of the land on which it was located could be claimed by his Christian mission. De Brabander, however, dismissed a re-burial of the bones and human remains at his post, as he considered it most probable that the site concerned a cemetery for “Nestorian heretics.” Following a reference to his sketches of the tombstones published with the letter, de Brabander provided further information on the location of the site:

The locality is positioned four hours northeast of my post, in the middle of the grasslands ... to the north of a large lake and a beautiful river. To the east and west, the grasslands stretch as far as the eye can see, to the south the grasslands measure five, to the north two hours.<sup>19</sup>

As for the FV, de Brabander closed his article with some thoughts on the origin of the cemetery and an earlier Christian presence in the region, while scolding the Buddhist lamas for their interference.

Importantly, de Brabander’s letter was published with his eight numbered sketches depicting 1) five tombstones that featured crosses, flowers, vases and Chinese styled altar furniture; 2) a stone stele with depictions of a kneeling lamb and candles, together with abstract objects; and 3) an elongated marble base. The sketches were completed with a caption providing some details on the stone and colour of the objects, positions and the aforementioned conversion of Chinese units to the metric system (for reproductions, see the section entitled **Objects** below).

Although de Brabander, and his immediate successor, Hendrick van Kerckvoorde, expressed intentions of further examination and even an archaeological dig at the site, there are no further publications that indicate such activities at the cemetery.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, it would take over three decades before CICM missionaries Rafaël Verbrugge and Charles Pieters would publish further documentation of the cemetery and its tombstones.

### **Documentation and Interpretation by Rafaël Verbrugge**

In the 1890s, a famine swept through the region of the cemetery and the attention of the CICM missionaries was diverted from the cemetery and its curious

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<sup>19</sup> Translation of the Dutch Version by the author. For the original Dutch Version, see DE BRABANDER 1891a, 412.

<sup>20</sup> HALBERTSMA 2015, 78.

tombstones to more important matters related to the famine and unrest in the region.

In 1906, however, CICM started a new missionary post at the village of Cheu-dzou-ze-Leang (Shizhuziliang).<sup>21</sup> One of the early CICM missionaries posted to the station was the colourful and eccentric Rafaël Verbrugge (1872-1957).<sup>22</sup> The year the post was established, Verbrugge, who used the Chinese name Qiao De Ming 乔德铭,<sup>23</sup> mapped out the region around the mission post and the cemetery with its Christian gravestones. It would, however, take a decade and a half before Verbrugge would publish his observations on “Cheu-dzou-ze-leang à ses débuts” in the *Bulletin de la Société (Royale) d’Etudes Coloniales*.<sup>24</sup> Importantly, Verbrugge identified the name of the cemetery as “Cheu-dzou-ze-leang”, which according to him meant “Hill of the column marked with a cross.”<sup>25</sup> In fact, Verbrugge remarked that the mission post was named after the cemetery with the Christian tombstones. It will be remembered that de Brabander, who was based at Hing-hwa-tung in 1890, did not attribute a name to the site, simply referring to it as a “cemetery”.

Verbrugge reported that the cemetery contained a number of tombstones and granite columns, decorated with Christian imagery, including crosses, chalices and altars.<sup>26</sup> The missionary observed that the granite columns were further decorated with candles and flowers. Noting that some objects had been removed by Christians of the village of “Ho-ma-hou”, Verbrugge remarked that he had secured a granite plate with the depiction of a “sacrificial table between two candles” for the mission post at Shizhuziliang.<sup>27</sup> It is here that Verbrugge also referred to the Buddhist monastery of “Poroseng, or in Chinese P’ouo-lou-sou-miao”, probably the “Poro osom sume” referred to by de Brabander.<sup>28</sup> Like de Brabander, Verbrugge considered that the objects had originated from “the time of the Nestorians” (or perhaps from another Christian group).

Although the actual documentation of the cemetery and its stones is limited, Verbrugge’s survey provided a treasure trove of information on localities, place names and geographic features related to the cemetery and its surroundings. Surprisingly, Verbrugge did not include any images of the site or its tombstones in his article, nor did he refer directly to de Brabander’s documentation. Instead

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<sup>21</sup> VAN OVERMEIRE 2009, 16.

<sup>22</sup> For a “bio-bibliography” and the unconventional life and times of Verbrugge see: VAN OVERMEIRE 2005 and 2007.

<sup>23</sup> VAN OVERMEIRE ET AL 2008, 624.

<sup>24</sup> VERBRUGGE 1922.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 19.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

he simply referred to a report published earlier in “les Annales de Scheut.”<sup>29</sup> The value of his contribution, however, lies primarily in his geographic observations and the two maps included in his report.

The Chinese map is titled “Shizhuziliang tianzhutangdi cuhuitu” 石柱子梁天主堂地粗繪圖 [A Rough drawing of the Catholic Church in Shizhuziliang] and fully annotated in Chinese characters (see Map 1).<sup>30</sup> Given the distinctly Chinese nature of the map and its classic handwriting, it is unlikely that Verbrugge is its author. The map, in relatively small scale, depicts the environs of Shizhuziliang, indicating the cemetery in its lower right corner. Importantly, the name is listed in Chinese characters as 石柱子梁 (Shizhuziliang). However, Verbrugge does not provide these characters in his writings; it is only through the publication of the map that the Chinese characters of the site are indicated. Above the place name, six tombstones on semi-circular mounds are drawn. Directly under the place name, a short text provides a *legenda* on the colours used in the map.<sup>31</sup>

The French language map entitled “Environs de Cheu-dzou-ze-leang” covers a much wider area than the Chinese map and gives the scale as 1:1,685,000 (see Map 2).<sup>32</sup> This French map covers the whole region, including the geographic features described in the article, and was presumably drawn by Verbrugge himself. In the map, the author depicts the city of Kalgan (today’s Zhangjiakou, 张家口市), the Great Wall, and important caravan routes to “Ourga” (today’s Ulaanbaatar), to “Koei-hoa-tch’eng” (today’s Hohhot), and to Dolonor, along with the main telegraph line north from Kalgan and various highlands, volcanoes and steppes.

In the top right corner of the map, to the east of the river “Ho-choei-ho-ze” [Black Water], is depicted the church site of Cheu-dzou-ze-lang.<sup>33</sup>

A number of important reference points related to the region and the cemetery, especially for later visitors to the cemetery such as Pieters, Sokobin and others, are indicated around the church site. These include, clockwise from Shizhuziliang: Ruines de Pei-tch’eng-ze (tsahan-balgason), Hing-hoa-tch’eng (Kara-balgason), District Montagneux de Si-wan, the Buddhist monastery of Puo-lotsai-Miao (Bortji-soum), Ho-ma-hou, the lake Angoulinor, or Angla and various churches located in the region. These features indicated on the map are frequently referred to in Verbrugge’s written description. Later visitors to the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 4 ref. 1, 14.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>31</sup> Verbrugge published his maps in black and white.

<sup>32</sup> VERBRUGGE 1922, 10.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 6.

cemetery, such as Pieters and Sokobin, would use similar place names and sites, albeit in a variety of languages and spellings.

### **Documentation and Interpretation by Charles Pieters (Karel Pieters)**

In 1924 the *Bulletin Catholique de Pékin*, a missionary publication printed in China, ran two short letters written in French by CICM missionary Charles Pieters on his various visits to the cemetery and its tombstones.

Pieters (1884-1926), who used the Chinese name Bian Chong Zheng, and the first name Karel in Dutch, had arrived in China in 1911 and was eventually posted between 1914 and 1925 to “Cheu-dzou-ze-leang,” or Shizhuziliang, as a parish priest.<sup>34</sup>

#### *First letter*

In his first letter of 30 December 1923, Pieters importantly confirmed the name of the site as “Cheu-dzou-ze-leang,” as well as providing the Chinese characters 石柱子梁 (Shizhuziliang).<sup>35</sup> Referring to de Brabander’s visit to the site in “1888 or 1889,” Pieters related how some of the graves had been opened, and how he had proceeded to open four further graves to uncover three Chinese mirrors, which he tentatively interpreted as dating from the Song and Liao dynasties (specifically, the years 983 and 1111 CE).

In addition to providing the name of the cemetery, Pieters located the site some “10 *li*” east of his residence, and some “30 *li* from Pei-tch’eng-ze with the ancient ruins of the imperial palace of Tch’a-han Balgasoun.” He noted that the stone objects from the cemetery were hewn from a rock not found in the vicinity of the site and suggested that they had been retrieved from near Pei-tch’eng-ze, where similar rock could be found. This led him to wonder if there could be a relationship between the two sites. Pieters further related how “Joan-Fou,” a local Christian, had retrieved stones from the cemetery and, like de Brabander, Pieters speculated whether the white marble block could have been the marble base of a “white marble cross.”

Pieters’ first letter was complemented by six photographs of four stones and a rubbing of one further stone. De Brabander, who most probably did not have access to photography in 1889, had made various sketches of the objects, forcing him to interpret the images and decorations. Verbrugge had limited himself to describing the site and its objects and mapping the area. Pieters’ photographs and rubbing obviously provided more detailed and exact documentation. Thus, Pieters’ rubbing of the tablet revealed the depiction of an incense burner carrying

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<sup>34</sup> VAN OVERMEIRE ET AL 2008, 396.

<sup>35</sup> PIETERS 1924a.

a “Latin cross” flanked by the letters I and S, rather than the lamb and abstract motifs sketched earlier by de Brabander (see **Object 7** below).

The captions with these images by Pieters provided metric sizes of the stones but also indicated that three of the stones were documented at Pieters’ residence, having obviously been relocated from the cemetery to Pieters’ mission post. Among these three stones was a stone slab depicting the lower arm of a cross rising from a lotus flower on a Chinese style altar table. This object had not been documented by de Brabander and can thus be understood as a new discovery by Pieters (see **Object 8** below).

Likewise, Pieters documented one further stone at the courtyard of “Joan-Fou,” an object which had been sketched by de Brabander at its original location at the cemetery. Indeed, de Brabander’s sketch of this object was surprisingly accurate, given the details revealed in Pieters’ photograph (see **Object 5** below).

De Brabander’s sketch of yet another stone column depicting a cross above a flower in a vase and a stack of five rocks, however, was far less accurate. The sketch included the cross and floral depiction in the vase, but depicted the mound of five rocks clearly visible in Pieters’ photograph as mere abstract forms (see **Object 6** below). Nonetheless, based on the descriptions and the floral imagery, it is virtually certain that de Brabander’s sketch and Pieters’ photograph document the same object.

### *Second letter*

In his second letter, dated 22 May 1924, Pieters reported how he guided Mr. Johnson, the American consul-general to China,<sup>36</sup> and Mr. Sokobin, the American consul at Kalgan, to the cemetery.<sup>37</sup> During the visit, Pieters discovered a new stone column not documented by de Brabander (see **Object 9** below). Some days later, Pieters returned to the cemetery with four labourers to uncover and document the newly discovered column. The granite tombstone was “well preserved” – measuring 265 cm in height, 40 cm in width and 25 cm in depth – and depicted a cross inside a circle on the front side and a cross rising from a lotus on a Chinese style altar table on the back side. The arms of the cross measured some 37 cm in diameter. Pieters further noticed that the grave was oriented on an east-west axis with the skull of the well-preserved skeleton positioned at the west end of the grave, resulting in the head facing eastward.

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<sup>36</sup> Before becoming aware of Sokobin’s contributions, I erroneously speculated in HALBERTSMA 2015, 79-80 whether the consul-general mentioned by Pieters could have been the British diplomat Reginald Johnston (who first documented the Fangshan stones around 1919).

<sup>37</sup> PIETERS 1924b.

Referring again to the published letter of de Brabander from 1890, Pieters remarked how the tablet with the *croix latine* (“Latin cross”) was located in front of a stone column which lacked a cross (see **Object 7** below).

Pieters’ second letter was published with two photographs of the newly discovered granite column, which depicted a cross inside a circle on the upper end of one side and a cross rising from a lotus flower on the other side (see **Object 9** below).

### **Documentation by Samuel Sokobin**

In October 1924, *The American Foreign Service Journal* published the first of two short articles by Samuel Sokobin on his visits to “Pai Ch’eng Tzu (literally, the White City)” and the cemetery of Shizhuziliang.<sup>38</sup> Both visits were made in the company of his colleague Johnson and were, as we already know, guided by Pieters. Consul Sokobin was stationed at the time in Kalgan, today’s city of Zhangjiakou.

#### *First Article*

Sokobin’s first article reported primarily on the visit to the ruined city of Pai Ch’eng Tzu. However, it also made some important references to the Christian cemetery and its location.

In his opening lines, for instance, Sokobin noted that the cemetery was located in the “Kalgan Consular District” and referred to “an ‘ancien cimeterie Chritien’ [*sic*] (as shown on a map made by a Belgian priest).” Sokobin did not identify the Belgian priest or the publication of the map, but it is most likely that he was referring to the maps published by Verbrugge in 1922. Suggesting that the cemetery “certainly dates back to the thirteenth century,” Sokobin’s article provided further essential details regarding the geography of the region and the locality of the cemetery:

Our first destination was Pai Ch’eng Tzu; this place I knew as the site near the Catholic Mission of Hei Ma Hu, 51 miles north of Kalgan, from which had been taken a number of finely carved blocks of white granite used in the construction of the Mission Church near-by. The church is barely a half mile west of Kalgan Urga caravan road...

Father Pieters, who speaks English, soon gave us the lay of the land. Pai Ch’eng Tzu, the White City, is about 2½ miles northeast from the Mission [of Hei Ma Hu, TH], and the cemetery about 10 miles from the White City. His own mission station [i.e. Shizhuziliang, TH] was

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<sup>38</sup> SOKOBIN 1924.

near the cemetery and he kindly offered his services as guide to the White City and to the cemetery.<sup>39</sup>

In his concluding paragraph, Sokobin noted that a lake “known as Anguli Nor” was located “within 10 miles of the site” [of the White City, TH].<sup>40</sup>

### *Second Article*

Sokobin’s second article, published in *The American Foreign Service Journal* of March 1925, concerned his actual visit to the cemetery of Shizhuziliang.<sup>41</sup> According to Pieters’ second letter in the *Bulletin Catholique de Pékin*, the visit took place in May 1924.

Sokobin’s second article provided further details on the location of the cemetery and especially on the whereabouts of the tombstones which had been removed from it. Importantly, his contribution included the most detailed descriptions of the objects, in terms of size, imagery, depictions of crosses and other characteristics.

As he had noted in his first article, Sokobin referred again to the cemetery as being listed on “an excellent map of the district north of Kalgan, China, made by a well known Belgian Catholic Missionary.”<sup>42</sup> Regrettably, the second article also failed to disclose further details on the map and its maker, but there is no reason to believe that he was referring to anything other than the publication by Verbrugge.

Sokobin continued:

To the northeast of Changan Nor... about ten miles distant therefrom, is a region known as Shi Chu Tzu Liang, in Chinese literally “Stone Columns.” Here Father Pieters who guided Consul General Johnson and myself about Chagan Nor, has his mission station. In the courtyard of the mission station may be seen three large stones.<sup>43</sup>

Sokobin described the first stone at Pieters’ post as “5 feet in length, 13 inches in width and a trifle less than 10 inches in thickness.” Though the stone was clearly broken, it depicted a cross “roughly Maltese in form,” above the depiction of a “conventionalized floral decoration” (see **Object 6** below). The second stone measured “about 4 feet in height, 28 inches in width and 7½ inches thick.” Sokobin noted that it was “roughly hewn and near the top, which has been broken, appears some carving, nothing very fine, but showing clearly a pedestal with a

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>41</sup> SOKOBIN 1925.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.



receptacle, above which appears a floral decoration. Immediately above this is a pearl-shaped object, evidently a part of the lower limb of a cross”<sup>44</sup> (see **Object 8** below).

Sokobin’s main interest, however, concerned the third stone, which measured “19 inches in height, 28 inches wide and three to four inches thick.” According to Sokobin, the stone depicted a “*Roman* cross and on the left hand side of the lower limb is faintly seen an I; on the right hand side is seen an S, and below the cross appears the carving of what is apparently an H... one’s thoughts immediately turn to *IN HOC SIGNO*”<sup>45</sup> (see **Object 7** below).

The three stones, Sokobin continued, had been presented to Pieters by a Chinese convert who owned the land on which part of the cemetery was located. The cemetery itself was located about 3½ miles from Father Pieters’ mission station.

When Pieters guided Sokobin and others to the cemetery, the latter noted that the site had been cultivated by Chinese farmers and partly dug up by treasure seekers. Only one tombstone remained erect, with another stone column partially buried at the site. The remaining stone depicted a cross measuring “16 inches from tip to tip, but the lower limb is a trifle longer than the upper limb.” Below the cross depiction, Sokobin noted, was a “representation of a vase or bowl on a stand, and from the vase emerges a floral decoration. Beneath the pedestal for the flower vase are carved two panels.” The stone was of granite and measured “7½ feet from the surface to the top, is 26 inches in width, and is about 10 inches thick”<sup>46</sup> (See **Object 1** below).

Following his visit to the cemetery, Sokobin documented one further tombstone “three miles from the cemetery... in the yard of a Chinese inn,” (see **Object 5** below). The stone measured “5 feet from the surface of the ground to the top, and is 17 inches in width and 10 inches thick.” Sokobin described one side of the stone, which featured:

a cross resembling the cross in the cemetery; the limbs of this cross are somewhat slenderer than those of the cross on the stone in the cemetery. Below the cross is a floral decoration, with an ellipse in which four dots are carved. Below the floral decoration appears a carving which is unintelligible to me. On the reverse face of the stone appears a cross, similar to the one on the obverse, but no floral decoration or other carving.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 79-80.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 80.

Sokobin further noted that the second stone, which had remained partly-buried at the cemetery, was excavated by Pieters a few days after their visit and relocated by Pieters to his mission post. The stone, according to Sokobin, measured “about 8 feet long, 16 inches in width and 10 inches thick. This stone shows a cross over a pedestal and vase with conventional floral decoration (lotus petals?) ... The center of the cross shows two concentric circles. On the reverse face is a cross carved within a circle. i.e., the limbs of the cross form two diameters of the circle”<sup>48</sup> (see **Object 9** below).

Sokobin devoted the remainder of his second article to comments on early Christian monuments and clergy in China. Comparing the cross depictions from Shizhuziliang to other depictions, such as the well-known Xi’an stele and the so-called Fangshan crosses, Sokobin contemplated whether the cemetery had “Nestorian” or Catholic origins. In the end, however, he concluded that, despite similarities with the Nestorian examples, the Roman cross and I and S initials argued towards a Catholic origin for the cemetery.<sup>49</sup>

By the time of Sokobin’s visit in 1924, the cemetery and its tombstones had been known for over three decades among some of the foreign community in China. Indeed, Sokobin remarked that “other foreigners” had visited the cemetery: “the well known Russian traveler Timkowski mentions it, and another Catholic missionary who visited it in the late eighties, mentions the fact that 30 or 40 stones were then standing.”<sup>50</sup>

The Catholic missionary referred to by Sokobin is most likely de Brabander, who, of course, discovered the site in 1889. Sokobin’s reference to Timkowski, however, is more puzzling, on which see further remarks below.

Sokobin’s second article was published with five figures: two photographs of stones with (partial) cross depictions at Pieters’ mission post (see **Objects 6 and 8** below); a photograph of the stone column with a cross depiction *in situ* at the cemetery (see **Object 1** below); a photograph of Pieters standing next to the stone column with a cross depiction at the yard of the Chinese inn (see **Object 5** below); and a photograph of a stone with cross depiction inside a circle, which had been examined by Sokobin at the cemetery, but was then relocated by Pieters to his post after Sokobin’s visit (see **Object 9** below). Surprisingly, given the attention he paid to it, Sokobin did not include an image of the stone with the Roman cross and IHS monogram in his second article.

Importantly, Sokobin’s second short article constitutes the final primary source documentation of the Christian cemetery and its tombstones.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

<sup>50</sup> SOKOBIN 1925, 79.

### Early References and Reproductions of the Documentation

De Brabander, Verbrugge, Pieters and Sokobin conducted limited yet crucial fieldwork at the cemetery of Shizhuziliang. Their field visits to the cemetery and its tombstones resulted in various interpretations, maps, and, importantly, primary source documentation involving descriptions, sketches, a rubbing and extensive photography of the tombstones and their imagery. Since the current whereabouts of the stones remain unknown, the documentation of de Brabander, Verbrugge, Pieters and Sokobin has become the only known source material for the tombstones. Regrettably, no thorough documentation of the cemetery itself has been recorded, other than a general description of its size, location, state and (ultimately) Chinese name. Only one photograph by Sokobin provides an impression of the steppe and low vegetation surrounding the cemetery.

Sokobin's puzzling remark that Timkowski (1790-1875) had referred to the cemetery suggests that the Russian explorer was the first foreigner to publish on the cemetery. Sokobin most probably referred here to George Timkowski's widely-read *Travels of the Russian mission through Mongolia to China, and residence in Peking, in the years 1820-1821*. The extensive Russian travelogue was published in 1827 in an English translation of the German translation of the Russian original. In other words, the translation was almost a century old when Sokobin consulted it. Curiously, neither of the two volumes makes a direct reference to the cemetery or the stones with Christian imagery. Timkowski did, however, visit the ruins of "Tsagan balgassou (white walled town)." His mission sought shelter at the ruined city on his way to Kalgan in November 1820<sup>51</sup> and on his return journey from Kalgan in May 1821<sup>52</sup> and it is presumably this that Sokobin was referring to.

It must be noted that Sokobin's first article covered his visit to "Pai Ch'eng Tzu" ("White City" in Chinese 白城子), which corresponds with de Brabanders "Tchagan balgason," ("White City" in Mongolian) and Pieters' "Pei-tch'eng-ze" and "Tch'a-han Balgason." The ancient site has been identified as the Middle Capital of the Yuan dynasty.<sup>53</sup> It is thus very possible that Sokobin confused Timkowski's reference to the ruined city of "Tsagan balgassou" with the cemetery. In the absence of clear references by Timkowski to the cemetery, de Brabander remains the first verified foreigner to have published information about it.

Various of the sketches and photographs, along with the rubbing, made by de Brabander, Pieters and Sokobin have been reproduced in overviews of the

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<sup>51</sup> TIMKOWSKI 1827 I, 269-270.

<sup>52</sup> TIMKOWSKI 1827 II, 371-372, 379. For the timeline of Timkowski's visit see TIMKOWSKI 1827 II, 470-471.

<sup>53</sup> See footnote 57 in TAKAHASHI 2021.

remains of the Church of the East in China and Mongolia published by Moule, Schurhammer, Dauvillier, Saeki and others.<sup>54</sup>

The Japanese scholar Yoshiro Saeki's publication in his seminal *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China* (1937) of three images from Shizhuziliang, deserves special mention in this context. The images are credited to CICM missionary and renowned Mongolist Antoine Mostaert and are simply captioned: "The Nestorian relics in the Bishop's Residence at Hsi-wan-tzü in Sui-yüan Province, By kindness of Father A Mostaert."<sup>55</sup> There are no indications that Saeki visited the site himself. The captions suggest the stones had been relocated for a second time, from Pieters' mission post at Shizhuziliang to the Bishop's Residence at Hsi-wan-tzü.

It must be noted that a brick wall is visible in the background of a photograph of the stone slab depicting the lower arm of a cross, reproduced by Saeki (see **Object 8** below). The brick wall indicates the new location of the slab and is a feature not seen in images published by Pieters or Sokobin. Regrettably it seems that the stone has been broken below the depiction, as Saeki's publication portrays a stone slab which is decidedly shorter than the object published by Pieters and Sokobin. One can only wonder whether the stone was deliberately broken at Pieters' mission post in order to reduce its size and weight for ease of transportation to the Bishop's Residence.

In addition, a photograph of the tablet with the depiction of the incense burner, the "Roman cross" and the IHS monogram seems to have been erroneously rotated clockwise in the process of printing (see **Object 7** below). Importantly, whereas de Brabander published a sketch of the object, Pieters only published a rubbing of this stone. Sokobin, despite his extensive interpretations of the object, did not publish any images of it. The photo published by Saeki is, despite its curious rotation, thus the only known photograph of the actual object.

In sum, the photographs published by Saeki are not reproductions of photographs taken by Pieters or Sokobin; rather, they constitute supplementary photographic evidence of the objects, thanks to Mostaert, who was obviously well aware of the objects themselves.<sup>56</sup>

Surprisingly, the aforementioned reproductions were all published in the first half of the twentieth century and were not referred to at all in the second half of the twentieth century, when academic interest in Shizhuziliang seems to have elapsed. Over half a century later, in 2008, the current author reprinted and interpreted the original source material by de Brabander and Pieters in a source

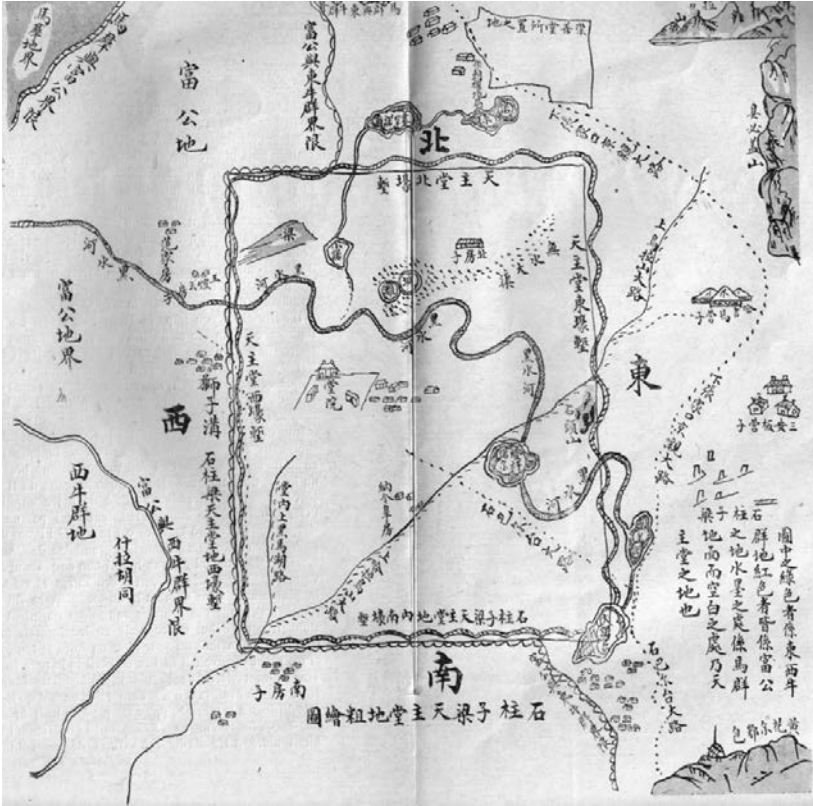
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<sup>54</sup> For an overview of these early reproductions, see HALBERTSMA 2015, 80, n. 30.

<sup>55</sup> SAEKI 1951, opp. 426.

<sup>56</sup> HALBERTSMA 2015, 80, n. 34.

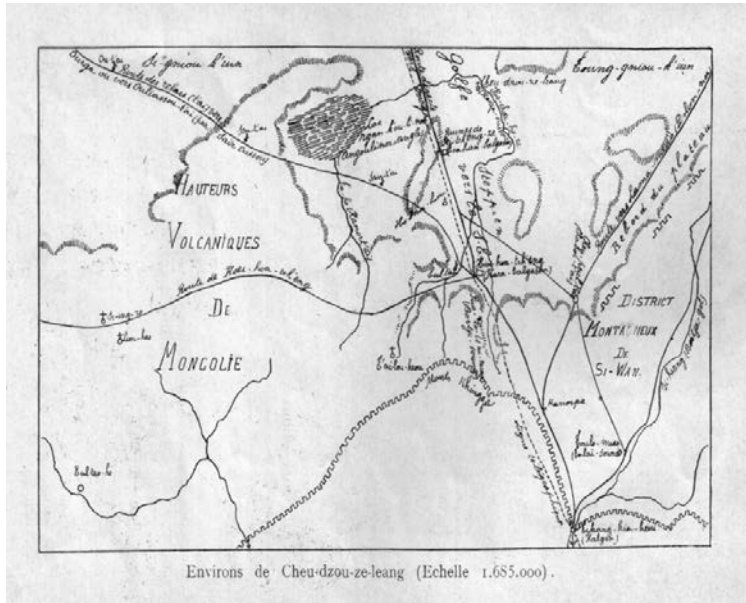
book, *Early Christian Remains of Inner Mongolia*.<sup>57</sup> The second edition of this volume (HALBERTSMA 2015) seems to have been the basis for reinterpretations by at least one other scholar.<sup>58</sup>



Map 1. Verbrugge 1922, 9: Chinese language map of the Catholic Church in Shizhuziliang, with the cemetery and tombstones in the lower right corner

<sup>57</sup> HALBERTSMA 2008 and HALBERTSMA 2015.

<sup>58</sup> CHEN ET AL 2020, 261-262, fig. 2 & 3.



Map 2. Verbrugge 1922, 10: French language map with the church of “Cheu-dzou-ze-leang,” (Shizhuziliang) in the upper middle right

### Localities and Whereabouts

The primary source documents of the cemetery and its objects refer to a variety of place names in various scripts and spellings (see Map 3). The identification of the place names obviously helps in identifying the current whereabouts of the tombstones of Shizhuziliang. The stones are known to have been relocated from the cemetery to at least five, perhaps, six other locations.

### Cemetery

In his first publication on the cemetery, de Brabander did not identify it by name. It would be Verbrugge and Pieters who would identify the site as “Cheu-dzou-ze-leang” and provide the Chinese characters for it: 石柱子梁 (Shizhuziliang). In his two contributions, Sokobin refers to the inclusion of the site in a map by a “Belgian priest” and a “well known Belgian Catholic,” most likely referring to Rafael Verbrugge, who had published his 1906 survey maps of the region only a few years earlier, in 1922.

The cemetery is frequently referred to in relation to other locations, namely de Brabander’s mission post, Pieters’ mission post and the ruins of the White City. These reference points are also of importance, since they help document the whereabouts of the objects from the cemetery.

De Brabander referred to the cemetery as “four hours” (DV) or “5 lieues” (FV) northeast of his residence at “Hing-hwa-tsung” (DV), or “Hing-Hoa-t’cheng” (FV).

Dirk Van Overmeire, editor of a Chinese language compendium of all CICM missionaries in China, proposes that de Brabander’s “Hing-hwa-tsung” concerns Xinhua-cheng (歸化城)<sup>59</sup> or “Sinhuatcheng (in Mongolian Kara Balgason<sup>60</sup>),” located in Heimahu and part of the mission district of Xiwanzi. Van Overmeire places Shizhuziliang some 15 km northeast of Xinhua-cheng in the “fertile region of Heituwa (*Terres Noires*).”<sup>61</sup> This distance more or less corresponds with de Brabander’s 5 leagues, as well as Verbrugge’s church site of Ho-ma-hou, which Verbrugge located 30 li (15 km) to the south of the village of Shizhuziliang.<sup>62</sup>

Another important reference point is provided from the ruins of the White City, presented in our sources in various forms, in relation to both the cemetery and the mission station of Hei Ma Hu. The White City, just north of present day Zhangbei, is easily located, thanks to its new museum dedicated to the ruins of the Yuan dynasty’s Middle Capital.

De Brabander refers to the ruins of “Pai-tschung, or tchagan balgason” as “one hour north” of his residence. The distance matches more or less with Verbrugge’s Ho-ma-hou being south of the ruins of “Pei-Ts’eng-zi.” In his first article, Sokobin mentions that the ruins of “Pai Ch’eng Tzu, the White City, is about 2½ miles northeast from the Mission [of Hei Ma Hu, TH].” This would suggest that Sokobin’s “Hei Ma Hu” corresponds with Verbrugge’s “Ho-Ma-hou” and de Brabander’s station “Hing-hwa-tsung” (DV), or “Hing-Hoa-t’cheng” (FV). In his first article, Sokobin also mentions that the cemetery was located “about 10 miles from the White City.”<sup>63</sup>

Finally, Hidemi Takahashi of the University of Tokyo locates de Brabander’s “Hing-hwa-tsung” at “Xinghecheng 興和城, which became the seat of Zhangbei County in 1913,” and advises this is also the station known as Heimahu (黑麻湖).<sup>64</sup>

Combined together, this information would indicate that the cemetery was positioned some 15 km northeast of de Brabander’s mission station “Hing-hwa-

<sup>59</sup> VAN OVERMEIRE ET AL 2008, 95.

<sup>60</sup> VAN OVERMEIRE 2007, 648.

<sup>61</sup> VAN OVERMEIRE 2009, 16.

<sup>62</sup> VERBRUGGE 1922, 3.

<sup>63</sup> SOKOBIN 1924, 4.

<sup>64</sup> See footnote 57 in TAKAHASHI 2021. At the time of writing, Takahashi had not seen the original article by de Brabander and was thus not aware of de Brabander’s letter explicitly listed “Hing-Hwa-Tsung” (DV) or “Hing-Hoa-t’cheng” (FV) as its place of writing (rather than Pieters’ curious reference to de Brabander’s stationing at “T’ai-luo-kou”, on which see below).

tsung.” The latter mission station, located just south of the White City, was also called “Hei ma hu” and “Ho-Ma-hou,” 黑麻湖 and can be identified with “Xinhuacheng/Sinhuatcheng” or “Xinghecheng,” in today’s Zhangbei County.

Another reference point for the cemetery is Pieters’ mission post. It must be noted that the cemetery and Pieters’ mission station were both identified as “Shizhuziliang.” In fact, it was Verbrugge who suggested that the mission post was named after the cemetery.

Pieters located the cemetery some “10 *li*” east of his residence, and some “30 *li*” from Pei-tch’eng-ze with the ancient ruins of the imperial palace of Tch’a-han Balgason,” the White City.

Sokobin locates Pieters’ mission station in the “region known as Shih Chu Tzu Liang” and the cemetery “about 3½ miles from Father Pieters’ mission station.” Sokobin’s 3½ miles corresponds with Pieters 10 *li*, approximately 5 km.

Takahashi argues that Pieters’ mission post of Shizhuziliang “was most probably in the village now called Shizhuliang (without “zi”), in Erquanjing Township, Zhangbei County 張北縣二泉井鄉石柱梁村 ... a village that still hosts a Catholic church.”<sup>65</sup> In this scenario, the cemetery would be “10 *li*, or approx. 5 km east” of today’s Shizhuliang.

Takahashi further argues that the cemetery itself was “probably to be located near today’s Xi’anban Village 西安板村, north of the ‘Swan Lake’/Tian’ehu 天鵝湖, one of a chain of lakes on the Heishui/Qara-usu River 黑水河 that eventually flows into Lake Anguli 安固里淖 (‘Duck Lake’ ...).”<sup>66</sup> The water ways and lake indicated by Takahashi correspond neatly with the geographical indications on the Chinese map published by Verbrugge.

### ***Tombstones***

A combined reading of the source documentation indicates that a documented marble base and three documented tombstones remained at their original site at the cemetery of Shizhuziliang. A further selection of tombstones, including five documented stones, were removed from the cemetery and relocated to at least five, or perhaps even six, other sites: an unspecified site, the Christian community identified by Verbrugge as “Ho-ma-hou,” the Buddhist monastery of Poro osom sume, the courtyard of Joan-fou, the Bishop’s Residence at “Hsi-wan-tzü” mentioned by Saeki and Pieters’ mission post at Shizhuziliang.

### ***Unspecified Location***

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<sup>65</sup> See footnote 57 in TAKAHASHI 2021.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*



The first general mention of such relocation is made by de Brabander, who remarked that the cemetery had previously contained some thirty graves, whereas only a mere seven tombstones remained on site at the time of his report and the now-legendary white marble cross had disappeared. De Brabander did not disclose in his first letter where the missing stones had been relocated to.

#### *Village of Ho-ma-hou*

Verbrugge mentioned that a number of stones had been taken by Christians from the village of “Ho-ma-hou.” This village is indicated by Verbrugge on his map and was located south of the Pei-Ts’eng-zi or Tchagan Balgason (“White City”). As already mentioned, the village of Ho-ma-hou has been identified as de Brabander’s residence in 1890 of “Hing-Hwa-Tsung” (DV) or “Hing-Hoa-t’cheng” (FV); today it is part of the capital of Zhangbei county. De Brabander explicitly listed the place names in his letter, so it is unclear why Pieters referred to de Brabander’s stationing at “T’ai-luo-kou, (台路溝),” today’s Tailuguo, which is located southwest of Zhangbei.<sup>67</sup> Pieters published his findings some three decades after de Brabander, so it is possible that he simply confused the location of the latter in 1890.

#### *Buddhist Monastery of Poro osom sume*

The third site of interest is the Buddhist monastery. De Brabander related reports that the mysterious white marble cross and some ten other stones had been relocated to the monastery of Poro osom sume (“Grey Water Monastery”) (DV) in 1889. The stones had reportedly been utilized by the monastery’s lamas for construction.

The French language map by Verbrugge lists the monastery of “Puo-lotsai-Miao or Bortji-soum.” In his article, Verbrugge refers to the Buddhist monastery as “Poroseng, or in Chinese P’ouo-lou-sou-miao.”

The momentous Chinese gazetteer *Zhangbei xianzhi* 張北縣志 of 1935 includes historic and religious sites in the Zhangbei region.<sup>68</sup> In its section on the monasteries of the Bordered Yellow Banner (Khovoot shar, or Xianghuang Qi, 鑲黃旗), the gazetteer lists a monastery by the name of Boluosu miao (波羅素廟).<sup>69</sup> According to the gazetteer, Boluosu monastery was located in the 3rd district, some 50 *li* north of Xi’an Cheng (Zhangbei) and to the east of Shizhuziliang. The extensive monastery was built under the reign of the Qianlong Emperor (1735-1796) by a Mongolian named Boluohuoxida (波羅活希達). During the Qing

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<sup>67</sup> PIETERS 1924a, 54.

<sup>68</sup> I am most grateful to Dr. Isabelle Charleux, author of *Temples et monastères de Mongolie-intérieure*, for identifying the monastery and providing details on the gazetteer and its related paragraphs on Boluosu Miao.

<sup>69</sup> *Zhangbei xianzhi* 1935, 295.

dynasty, the gazetteer adds, citizens of the entire banner would bring offerings of milk for making into dairy products or *airag* (fermented horse milk). Photographs included in the gazetteer further indicate that the monastery consisted of a Chinese-style hall with a wooden storey and a porch.<sup>70</sup>

Given the gazetteer's identification of Boluosu and the location of the monastery near Shizhuziliang, it is most likely that de Brabander's Poro osom sume, along with Verbrugge's Poroseng and P'ouo-lou-sou-miao, all corresponding to the gazetteer's Boluosu Monastery. Though the gazetteer mentions the place Shizhuziliang, it predictably makes no mention of the Christian tombstones from there that were reputedly taken to the monastery.

The salvage and appropriation of Nestorian tombstones as building material for new structures are well attested to in Inner Mongolia. Christian gravestones and other material from sites associated with the Church of the East in Inner Mongolia were re-used as building material for part of farm walls, farm foundations, tourist sites and the like, as it has been documented by the current author.<sup>71</sup> Sokobin also mentioned in his first publication that stone material from the ruins of Pai Ch'eng Tzu was used for the construction of the mission church at Hei Ma Hu, 51 miles north of Kalgan.<sup>72</sup>

Following much damage during the Cultural Revolution, the monastery of Buluosu is once again functioning.

#### *Courtyard of Joan-fou*

The fourth site of interest concerns the location identified by Pieters as "Joan-fou," where he documented a stone pillar (see **Object 5** below). De Brabander had sketched both sides of the pillar at the cemetery, whereas Pieters published two photographs of the object with the caption: *Pierre se trouvant dans le cour de Joan-fou* [Stone to be found in the courtyard of Joan-fou]. In his second letter, Pieters refers again to the site, but now as the "community of Joan-fu."<sup>73</sup>

Sokobin simply refers to the site as "the yard of a Chinese Inn" located "three miles from the cemetery." Sokobin's photograph portrays Pieters standing next to the tombstone, in front of a single Chinese house. The locality of the Christian Joan-fou, or the community of Joan-fou, could not be further determined by the current author.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 281-282.

<sup>71</sup> For appropriation of "Nestorian" heritage by settlers, see HALBERTSMA 2015, 241-259.

<sup>72</sup> Sokobin 1924, 4.

<sup>73</sup> PIETERS 1924b, 249.

*Bishop's Residence at "Hsi-wan-tzü"*

The fifth location concerns the three stones published by Saeki in 1937 and identified in the caption as coming from "Hsi-wan-tzü."<sup>74</sup> The stones seem to have been moved there from Pieters' mission station. Verbrugge mentioned he had secured at least one stone, with the depiction of two candles, for Pieters' mission station during his 1906 survey. Pieters captioned three of the documented tombstones as "Actuellement à la Résidence" (see **Objects 6-8** below), presumably referring to his own mission post. It is Sokobin who confirms this in his second article when he refers to "three large stones ... presented to Father Pieters by a Chinese convert who owns a large tract of land from which the stones came."<sup>75</sup> It is not clear if there is a relation between Sokobin's "Chinese convert" and the "Chinese inn" (Pieters' court at "Joan-fou") of **Object 5**.

These three stones, however, are described by Saeki in 1937 as located at the "Bishop's Residence at Hsi-wan-tzü in Sui-yüan Province."<sup>76</sup> It is thus believed that the stones were no longer at Pieters' mission post by 1937, but had been relocated for a second time. Saeki's "Bishop's Residence at Hsi-wan-tzü" concerns the Roman Catholic Diocese of Xiwanzi (西灣子) in today's Chongli (崇礼县城), northeast of Zhangjiakou.<sup>77</sup>

*Pieters' Mission Post at Shizhuziliang*

The sixth site of interest concerns Pieters' mission station at Shizhuziliang, the last known location of the final tombstone, which depicted a cross inside a circle. This had been discovered and documented by Pieters in his second letter and, according to Sokobin, taken to "Pieters' station" (see **Object 9** below). Since this object was not included in Saeki's publication, it may have remained at the Shizhuziliang mission post when the other objects were relocated to Xiwanzi. The location of the post was already identified by Takahashi as probably Erquanjiang Township in Zhangbei county, on which see above.

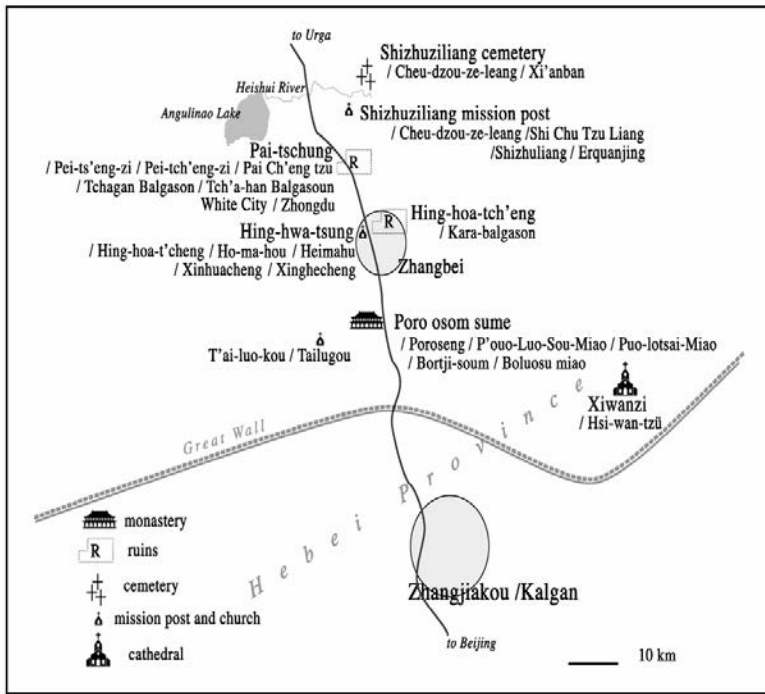
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<sup>74</sup> SAEKI 1951, 426.

<sup>75</sup> SOKOBIN 1925, 79.

<sup>76</sup> SAEKI 1951, 426.

<sup>77</sup> Interestingly, the cathedral is also included in *Zhangbei xianzhi* 1935, 297-298.



Map 3. Place names, as mentioned in chronological order by various authors, relevant to location of the cemetery and its objects (map by Ulli Herold).

### Origins and Confessional Identification

De Brabander, Verbrugge, Pieters and Sokobin each speculated about the origins of the cemetery and the tombstones, querying whether they belonged to followers of the Catholic Church or to so-called “Nestorian heretics.” De Brabander, Verbrugge and Pieters seem to have leaned towards a “Nestorian” interpretation, whereas Sokobin suggested the cemetery had Catholic origins.

There is no reason to doubt that the site they visited was indeed a cemetery and that the recorded stones were tombstones marking graves of Christians. De Brabander and Pieters reported their encounters with opened graves and corpses and the stones were positioned as tombstones at the graves.

The documentation distinguishes two types of tombstones: those shaped as columns (**Objects 1-6 and 9**) and those in the form of stone slabs roughly shaped as a tablet (**Objects 7 and 8**).<sup>78</sup>

<sup>78</sup> I discount here reports of the so-called “white marble cross,” which has not been identified or documented, other than through hearsay.

As noted above, objects found in the graves and documented by Pieters suggest that they date from the years 983 and 1111 CE, during the Song and Liao dynasties. Christian graves of the Church of the East from the same era have been recorded in Inner Mongolia.<sup>79</sup> Likewise, the positioning of the graves and corpses facing towards the east is also recorded in the region.<sup>80</sup>

The question thus remains; to which Christian group do the graves belong? The presence of both Roman Catholics and “Nestorian” Christians of the Church of the East is well attested for the region and this period; it may well be that the combined tombstones do not belong to one tradition, but originate rather from both the Catholic Church and the Church of the East.

The one object with a clear designation seems to be the tablet with the so-called IHS-monogram. Sokobin interpreted the depiction as distinctly showing “a Roman Cross” and identified the three letters IHS (commonly understood to represent the Latin words *In hoc signo*, “*in this sign*”), both of which would seem to indicate a Roman Catholic origin.

Sokobin’s interpretations, which match my conclusions in 2008 (at a time when I was not aware of his contributions),<sup>81</sup> are most likely based on an examination of the actual stone at Pieters’ mission post, rather than from Pieters rubbing published in the *Bulletin*. The rubbing provided a remarkably clear depiction of the engravings of the stone; if Sokobin had had access to the rubbing, he would have noticed that a rectangular cross was rising from an incense burner between two candles. Furthermore, the H in Sokobin’s IHS-monogram is merely *suggested* by the depiction of the lower part of the cross. The combination of the lower arm of the cross with the I and S depictions (resulting in the IHS-monogram impression) may suggest that the local stone mason was not too familiar with what he was carving, thus fusing the undoubtedly unfamiliar western script with the depiction of the cross.

The image, consisting of rectangular line drawings of the arms of the cross with the lower arm longer than the others, indeed suggests a Roman Catholic cross. As such, it is a unique depiction, not attested before in this region and not found among the “Nestorian” corpus from China or Mongolia, where crosses are generally depicted with arms of equal length.

Though the incense burner and candle depictions are strikingly Chinese in style and would equally fit a “Nestorian” style of art, they also constitute unique depictions not found on Christian gravestones of the Church of the East in China. Both the style of the cross and the IHS-monogram thus suggest a Roman Catholic

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<sup>79</sup> HALBERTSMA 2015, Chapter 6.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 137, 181-182.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 204-205.

origin for the stone, whereas the depictions of the candles and incense burner strengthen the uniqueness of this object.

Another aspect suggesting a Roman Catholic presence or origin for the cemetery is the mysterious “large white marble cross,” reported on so many occasions to de Brabander. Though de Brabander did not find the object, it was reported to him by at least three different sources.

As noted above, it was reported that the cross had measured some 1.5 m in height and was, according to other reports, moved in 1889 to the monastery of Poro osom sume (“Grey Water Monastery”). During a second visit to the cemetery, another source indicated the original location of the cross to de Brabander. According to the FV of the missionary journal, although the cross had disappeared, the source pointed to a place where a *soubassement en marbre*, a “marble foundation” remained (the DV merely indicates a “place” rather than a marble base). It must be noted that one of the sketches published by de Brabander concerned a “white marble base, measuring 4 feet”; one may wonder if this were indeed the base for the reported white marble cross identified by de Brabanders’ source.

The description of “a large white marble cross,” suggests an object shaped in outline as a cross. Though crosses of considerable size are found among the Nestorian corpus from the region, these are hewn into stone slabs, not unlike **Object 8**.<sup>82</sup> As such, I am not aware of any known “Nestorian” objects identified in the region that would conform to the description given by de Brabander, a description which may suggest another Roman Catholic dimension to the site.

The remaining objects recorded at the cemetery or originating from the site are seven tombstones with cross depictions: six in the shape of stone columns and one stone slab. Christian tombstones or grave markers shaped as columns are unique among the known Christian tombstones from the region.<sup>83</sup> Compared to the early Christian tombstones in Inner Mongolia, shaped as horizontal sarcophagi, or the standing tombstones documented in Quanzhou, elaborate yet relatively small, these stones are strikingly high and narrow. In addition, they are vertically positioned, with the lower end dug deep into the ground to avoid collapsing.

The cross depictions on the columns and the stone slab indicate the Christian origins of the site and stylistically suggest a “Nestorian” connection. Sokobin already noted that the cross on the final stone column (see **Object 9** below) was stylistically similar (in terms of the depiction of a circle) to the so-called crosses

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<sup>82</sup> See for instance: HALBERTSMA 2015, 441-442, 459-466.

<sup>83</sup> For some comments on the uniqueness of stone columns or pillars, see HALBERTSMA 2015, 203-204.

of “Fang Shan,” some 50 km southwest of Beijing.<sup>84</sup> The cross style of the former is symmetrical, with arms of equal or near equal length, decorated with a lotus flower or Chinese style altar table. Similar compositions are found throughout the corpus of gravestones from Inner Mongolia.

Further stylistic similarities are found far beyond the region though. As already highlighted by Li Chonglin and Niu Ruji, the depiction of a partial cross above an altar table and lotus (see **Object 8** below) is strikingly similar to an image found on a “Nestorian” tombstone from Almaliq which is dated to 1301/1302 CE and commemorates a member of the Church of the East.<sup>85</sup>

Finally, the absence of inscriptions (disregarding the initials “I” and “S” found on one tablet) is not uncommon on other tombstones from the Church of the East, such as the ones found in Inner Mongolia.

In other words, the stones from Shizhuziliang depict a combination of both common characteristics of the Church of the East and unique characteristics which are not found among archaeological artefacts connected with the Church of the East in China and Central Asia.

Indeed, the site reminds us of the Christian tombstones documented in Quanzhou. Although most of the deceased Christians buried there during the Mongol era belonged to the Church of the East, there was also a Catholic gravestone inscription in Latin script. As with Shizhuziliang, most of the tombs from Quanzhou display the iconography that has come to be associated with the Church of the East in China and Central Asia.<sup>86</sup>

As noted above, the Shizhuziliang cemetery seems to encompass gravestones originating from both the Church of the East and the Catholic Church. This combination, although similar to that encountered in Quanzhou, is highly idiosyncratic and raises a number of pertinent questions, some already touched upon by De Brabander, Verbrugge, Pieters and Sokobin. For instance, one may consider what the Catholic representations indicate about the ethnicity of the individual whose grave was marked with the stone, or of the local priest associated with the site at the time. To whom did this object with such western Catholic representations belong, among so many tombstones of the Church of the East? Why was it positioned in a cemetery that exhibits so much of the iconography of the Church of the East? Does the object relate to the early Latin missionaries of the Mongol period, missionaries such as John of Montecorvino, or indeed to the later Jesuit presence in China? A closer examination of the

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<sup>84</sup> SOKOBIN 1925, 80

<sup>85</sup> LI & NIU 2009, 93-94.

<sup>86</sup> On the iconography of the Church of the East, see PARRY 1996; on that of the Quanzhou stones, see LIEU ET AL 2012, 243-262.

cemetery and objects from Shizhuziliang may well provide new insights into these questions.

## Objects

The nine documented objects, consisting of eight tombstones with Christian imagery and one marble base, identified in the writings of de Brabander, Pieters, Sokobin and others, can be organized by the last known location as follows:

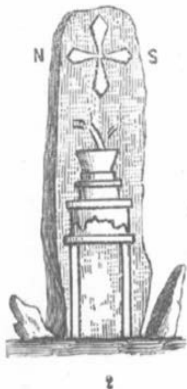
### *Cemetery of Shizhuziliang*

**Object 1.** Stone column with depiction of a cross above a potted flower on top of a Chinese style cabinet.

De Brabander 1891, Sketch 2: Sketch at cemetery of front side facing west, with north-south orientation indicated;

Pieters 1924a, opp. p. 54, right: Photograph at cemetery of front side, with caption listing measurement of 2.35 m;

Sokobin 1925, Figure 3: Photograph at cemetery of front side, with some vegetation in background and detailed description in article.



De Brabander 1891



Pieters 1924a



Sokobin 1925

**Object 2.** (below left) Stone column with depiction of cross inside a cross with elongated lower arm and indented left, right and upper arms.

De Brabander 1891, Sketch 4: Sketch at cemetery of front side facing west, with north side indicated.

**Object 3.** (below right) Stone with depiction of single cross.

De Brabander 1891, Sketch 6: Sketch at cemetery of front side.





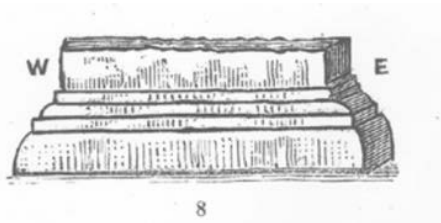
De Brabander 1891



De Brabander 1891

**Object 4.** Marble base.

De Brabander 1891, Sketch 8: Sketch at cemetery of marble base, with west-east orientation indicated and caption listing measurement of 128 cm, speculated to be the base of the “white marble cross”.



De Brabander 1891

*Courtyard of Joan-fou*

**Object 5.** Stone column with depiction of a cross above a lotus, a single elongated root on the front side and a single cross on the back side.

- De Brabander 1891, Sketch 1 and 3: Two sketches at cemetery of front and back side.
- Pieters 1924a, opp. 55, right (*recto* and *verso*): Two photographs at courtyard of Joan-fou of front (*recto*) and back side (*verso*).
- Sokobin 1925, Figure 4: Photograph at “Chinese inn” of front side with lotus, with Pieters and farmhouse.



De Brabander 1891



Pieters 1924a



De Brabander 1891



Pieters 1924a



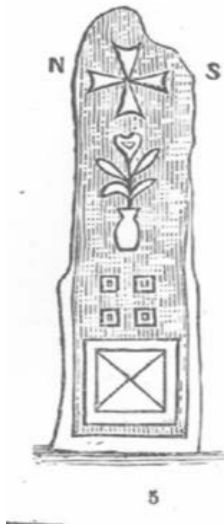
Sokobin 1925

*Bishop's Residence at Hsi-wan-tzū (Xiwanzi)*

**Object 6.** Stone column with depiction of a cross above a flower in a vase, on top of a stack of five rocks.

- De Brabander 1891, Sketch 5: Sketch of front side facing west, with north-south orientation indicated, at cemetery.
- Pieters 1924a, opp. p. 54, left: Photograph at Pieters' mission post of Shizhuziliang of front side, with caption listing measurement of 1.60 m.

- Sokobin 1925, Figure 1: Contour photograph at Pieters' mission post of Shizhuziliang of front side.
- Saeki 1951, opp. 426, left: Photograph at Pieters' mission post of Shizhuziliang provided by Antoine Mostaert (1937).



De Brabander 1891



Pieters 1924a



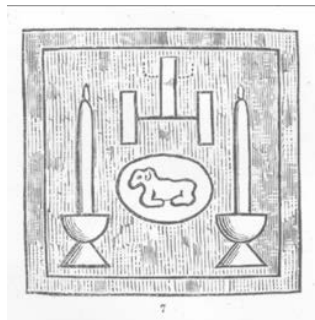
Sokobin 1925



Saeki 1951

**Object 7.** Stone tablet with depiction of cross and IHS-monogram, above incense burner between two candles.

- De Brabander 1891, Sketch 7: Sketch of tablet at cemetery with depiction of a lamb between candles below an abstract image;
- Pieters 1924a, opp. p. 54, middle: Photograph of rubbing at Pieters' mission post at Shizhuziliang of depiction of cross and IHS-monogram above incense burner between two candles, with caption listing measurement of 0.50 m;
- Saeki 1951, opp. 426, top right: Photograph at Pieters' mission post of Shizhuziliang, provided by Antoine Mostaert (1937) .



De Brabander 1891



Pierre actuellement à la Résidence.  
Photog. de l'estampage. Hauteur du dessin 0m, 50

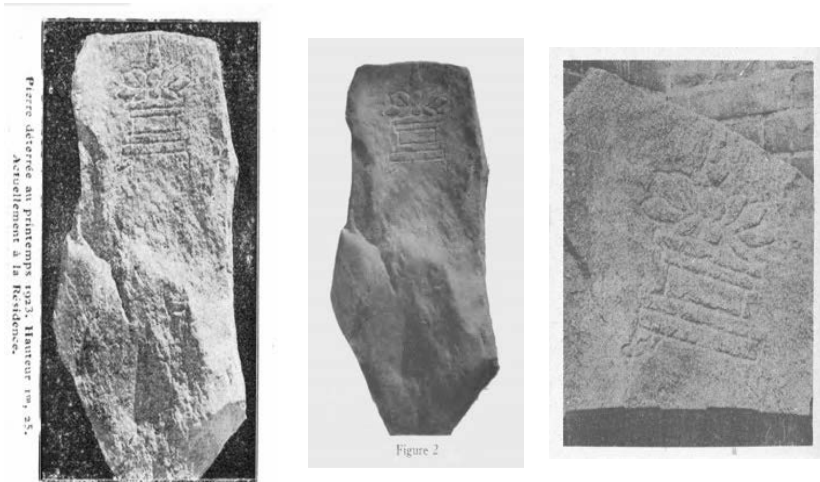
Pieters 1924a



Saeki 1951 [rotated]

**Object 8.** Stone slab with depiction of lower arm of cross rising from lotus on Chinese style altar table.

Pieters 1924a, opp. p. 55, left: Photograph at Pieters' mission post at Shizhuziliang of stone slab with caption, listing measurement of 1.25 m; Sokobin 1925, Figure 1: Contour photograph at Pieters' mission post at Shizhuziliang of stone slab, with detailed description in article; Saeki 1951, opp. 426, top right: Photograph at Pieters' mission post of Shizhuziliang, provided by Antoine Mostaert (1937).



Pieters 1924a

Sokobin 1925

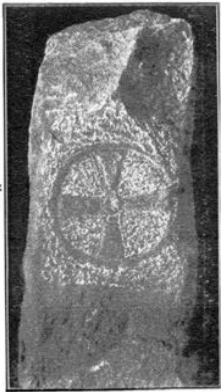
Saeki (1937)

### *Mission Post at Shizhuziliang*

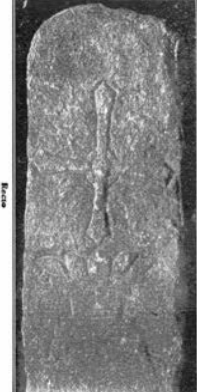
**Object 9.** Stone column with depiction of a cross in circle on the front side and cross rising from lotus on Chinese style altar table on the back side.

- Pieters 1924b (*recto* and *verso*): Two photographs, presumably at Pieters' mission post at Shizhuziliang, of front (*verso*) and back (*recto*), with captions listing measurements (H: 2.65 m, W: 0.40 m, D: 0.25 m) and diameter of cross (37 cm).
- Sokobin 1925, Figure 5: Contour photograph at Pieters' mission post at Shizhuziliang of top part of stone cross rising from lotus on Chinese style altar table, with detailed description in article.

*La photographie ne donne que la partie supérieure de la pierre.*  
 Hauteur : 22 65 ; largeur : 20 40 ; épaisseur : 20 25 ;  
 l'axe de la croix : 20 37.



Pieters 1924a



Pieters 1924a

PIERRE CRUCIFÈRE DE CHEU-DZOU-DE LIANG  
 découverte en Mai 1924



Figure 5

Sokobin 1925

**Conclusion**

A more definite conclusion regarding the traditions and origins of the stones would require a closer examination of the cemetery and the actual objects. Due to the coronavirus pandemic and prolonged travel restrictions in China, the author has not been able to visit any of the identified sites where objects from Shizhuziliang have been documented, but he intends to do so at a later stage.

An investigation into the current whereabouts of the tombstones from Shizhuziliang cemetery should start, of course, with the cemetery site at Takahashi’s Xi’anban Village and the current Catholic church at Erquanjing, the location of Pieters’ former mission post.

The monastery of Boluosu is another obvious location to search for the fabled “marble cross” and Christian tombstones from Shizhuziliang. An examination into the whereabouts of the tombstones should further include the former Bishop’s Residence in Xiwanzi. Attempts to identify the so-called Chinese inn and the community at Joan Fu would also be most appropriate.

Finally, a thorough study of Chinese sources, including archaeological reports, may yield further crucial details of both the cemetery and its intriguing tombstones.

**Postscript**

Following a presentation of the author at the conference “Involvement of the Christian Missions in the Exchange of Knowledge with Asia” organized by the Royal Academy for Overseas Sciences of Belgium and the Académie des

Sciences d'Outre-Mer of France (Brussels, 4-5 October 2021) and a subsequent private visit to Rome in autumn 2021, the current author gained an intriguing insight regarding the depictions on **Object 6** which merits a postscript to the current article.

The depiction of a stack of five rocks from **Object 6** strongly reminds us of the coat of arms depicting a stack of six stones under a star on *the Porta del Popolo*, the well-known gate in the Aurelian Walls of Rome. The latter coat of arms belonged to the influential Chigi-family, founded in the late fifteenth century in Sienna, Italy. The coat of arms was later expanded with the depiction of an oak tree. These two motifs of the original stones and the later oak tree also entered the papal coat of arms of Pope Alexander VII (1599-1667). The latter, born Fabio Chigi, was of course a member of the Chigi-family.

The resemblance of the rocks depicted on **Object 6** and in the coat of arms' may even be extended to the floral depiction on **Object 6** and the oak tree included in the later coat of arms. This would also allow for the interpretation of a sixth rock depicted on **Object 6**.

The striking resemblance may suggest that **Object 6** originates from Latin traditions rather than the Church of the East. It will be remembered that **Object 7**, and perhaps **Object 4**, depict characteristics referring to the Latin Church, see above. Alternatively, the resemblance may be coincidental and the rocks depicted on **Object 6** may simply represent another subject, for instance an *ovoo*, the sacred stone heaps raised in the Mongolian steppes.

The gravestones from Shizhuziliang, in other words, continue to raise intriguing questions regarding their origins and the traditions they belong to. The search for the missing objects and a closer examination of the depictions they feature now seem even more pertinent.

(Groningen, 27 October 2021)

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# YONAN OF ALMALIQ AND THE SYRO-UIGHUR CHIFENG BRICK (1253)

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## 1. Introduction

The Syro-Uighur bilingual Chifeng brick has been considered as one of the most significant Syriac Christian relics in China. Found in the early 1980s by a local peasant inside of the ruin of Songzhou 松州 near a modern village called Chengzi 城子, around 30 km southwest of the Chifeng 赤峰 city of Inner Mongolia, it is a brick with an inscribed and glazed image of a cross combined with a lotus underneath and two lines inscription in Syriac and eight lines in Old Uighur. It was first published and successfully deciphered and translated into French by James Hamilton and Niu Ruji in 1994.<sup>1</sup> The Chifeng brick has been on several exhibitions, therefore, its photo has been reproduced several times.

The Syriac text, according to Hamilton and Niu, reads *hūr lwōṯeh* (French: “contemple-le”) and *sbarū beh* (French: “espérez en lui”) taken from Psalm 34:6 of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup> The Old Uighur text as follows is based on Hamilton and Niu 1994<sup>3</sup> but with minor changes:

1. alaqsantoroz xan saqış-i ming
2. beš yüz altmiš tört taβyač
3. saqış-i ud yil aram ay
4. ygirmikä bu ordu igäzi
5. yonan kümkä sängüm yetmiš
6. bir yašinta t̄ri yrl̄-i bütürdi
7. bu bäg-niñ öšüti t̄ri mängü
8. w(i)š̄dmax-ta ornađmaqi bolzu[n?]

English translation based on Hamilton-Niu’s French translation:

Emperor Alexandrian year of one thousand six hundred and sixty-four, Chinese year of the Ox, the twentieth of the first moon, the head of the seat of government Yonan, commander assigned to auxiliary troops, at the age of seventy-one fulfilled the will of God. May the soul of this lord take place in heavenly eternal

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<sup>1</sup> HAMILTON & NIU 1994. NIU 2010, 210-217.

<sup>2</sup> HAMILTON & NIU 1994, 148 (with French translation).

<sup>3</sup> See: Ibid., 150 (cf. The transcription of the Turkic inscription by HAMILTON & NIU).

paradise!<sup>4</sup>

Both the Alexander and Chinese years correspond to 1253, the third year of Möngke Qa'an's reign. According to the Old Uighur inscription, Yonan died at the age of seventy-one in 1253. Hamilton and Niu presumed that this Yonan was of Öngüt, an East Syriac Christian Turkic tribe. However, the Öngüt (or Öng'üt, 汪古, 雍古) resided in the territories of the Yinshan Mountains 陰山 or Dalan-Qara (roughly modern Baotou 包头, Hohhot 呼和浩特 and northern Ordos 鄂尔多斯), more than seven hundred kilometers away from Chifeng. Among the Öngüt Christian remains featuring sarcophagus-shaped gravestones,<sup>5</sup> there is no such thing like the Chifeng brick. On the other hand, Chifeng was the residence of Qongqirat which is not a Christian tribe.

Who is this Yonan? Where did he originally come from? What role did he play in the Mongol Empire? All these previously unsolved questions can be answered in the light of a group of Chinese steles concerning a Christian family in Jining 濟寧 of Shandong Province, North China.

## 2. A Christian Family in Jining

The texts of the Chinese steles concerning a Christian family in Jining are preserved in the *Gazetteer of Juye County* of 1846 (道光《鉅野縣志》).<sup>6</sup> The Juye County was the seat of Jining Circuit under the Mongol rule. Some of the texts were first noticed in a 1982 Chinese article concerning the appanage of the Qongqirat tribe.<sup>7</sup> But the Christian characteristics were not recognized until Zhang Jiajia and Chen Gaohua respectively published their respective articles in 2010 and 2011. I have discussed the Christian personal names in these inscriptions<sup>8</sup> and published the only extant fragmental stele, of which the verso is not recorded in the *Gazetteer*.<sup>9</sup> The relevant steles are listed below with page numbers in the *Gazetteer*:<sup>10</sup>

STELE 1. “Stele of the Directorate-General Office of the Jining Circuit” 濟寧路總管府記碑 (1287), pp. 32a-34a.

STELE 2. “Stele of praise to the good administration of Mr. Mu, *daruqachi* of the Jining Circuit” 濟寧路達魯花赤陸公善政頌碑 (ca. 1295), pp. 36b-39b.

STELE 3. “Stele of the burial of Altan-buqa with his wives Lady Xin and Lady

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Ibid*, 150.

<sup>5</sup> HALBERTSMA 2015.

<sup>6</sup> See *Daoguang juye xianzhi* (*juan* 20), 19b-27b; 28a-34b; 36b-39b. Cf. *Quan Yuanwen* 1999 (punctuational but incomplete ed.), Vol. 5, 442-443; Vol. 47, 352-354; Vol. 56, 108-110.

<sup>7</sup> YE 1982, 87.

<sup>8</sup> MA 2016

<sup>9</sup> MA 2020

<sup>10</sup> Cf. ZHANG 2010, 40-41; CHEN 2011, 364.

Chen” 少中大夫按檀不花暨夫人辛氏陳氏合葬神道碑 (1329), pp. 23a-27b.  
 STELE 4. “Tomb stele of Mr. Le Shan” 樂善公墓碑 (1339), pp. 28a-31b.  
 STELE 5. “Stele of [...] *biao* [...] *qing*” [...]表[...]慶之碑 (after 1342), pp. 19b-22a (recto); Ma 2020 (verso).

During the reign of Qubilai (r. 1260-1294), Altan-Buqa 按檀不花 was appointed *daruqachi* of the Jining Circuit, therefore, he settled down at Jining in 1273. His original name was Temür-Buqa, meaning “Steel Ox” (Chinese transcription: *Tiemuer buhua* 鐵木兒不花, or *Temuer buhua* 忒木兒不花) which was shortened as Mr. Mu (睦公) in Chinese.<sup>11</sup> After Temür Qa’an (1265-1307) succeeded Qubilai’s throne in 1294, Temür-Buqa changed his name to Altan-Buqa, meaning “Gold Ox”,<sup>12</sup> probably to avoid using the name of the emperor. Altan-Buqa’s descendants served mainly as local administrators in Jining which was the appanage of the Qongqirat tribe.

Despite the steles were written in elegant Chinese, it is not difficult to identify the Christian elements. Altan-Buqa was described as “proficient in Buddha’s teachings and strict in fasting, and his fasting and dieting would last more than one month” (深通佛法, 持戒甚謹……齋素食, 月餘而罷). Here the Chinese term *Fofa* 佛法 literally “Buddha’s teachings” was actually a borrowed rhetoric to refer to Christianity. Altan-Buqa built two monasteries 寺,<sup>13</sup> presumably of Syriac Christianity.

Altan-Buqa’s coffin seems to be made of stone (槨棺以石),<sup>14</sup> possibly indicating a sarcophagus-shaped East Syriac Christian gravestone, of which similar remains have been found in Inner Mongolia and Quanzhou.<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that such a gravestone was recently rediscovered near the ruin of Quanning Circuit 全寧路 (modern Udan 烏丹鎮 of Ongniud Banner 翁牛特旗, 100 km north of Chifeng) which was constructed in 1295 as the winter residence of the Qongqirat ruling house.<sup>16</sup>

Altan-buqa’s tomb appears to be a mound made of brick (塼堦於上). Later his

<sup>11</sup> See: STELE 1; STELE 2.

<sup>12</sup> During his life time, Altan-Buqa’s name appeared in two steles: the “Chongjian zhisheng wenxuanwang miao bei” 重建至聖文宣王廟碑 [The stele of rebuilding the Temple of Confucius] (1301) and “Queli zhaimiao luocheng hou bei” 闕里宅廟落成後碑 [The stele after the completion of the Temple of Confucius in Queli] (1307). See CHEN 1505 in Beijing tushuguan guji zhenben congkan [Beijing Library Rare Ancient Books Collection Series] 1987, Vol. 23, 621-623; 623-634.

<sup>13</sup> See: STELE 3, in *Daoguang juyue xianzhi* 1846, 25b.

<sup>14</sup> See: STELE 4 in *Daoguang juyue xianzhi* 1846, 29a.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. HALBERTSMA 2015. WU 2005, 421-433.

<sup>16</sup> TANG 2019.

son Sauma (1261-1335) established a building named “Hall of Requit for Virtue” 報德堂 to place Altan-Buqa’s statue and painted the images of Sauma brothers and their wives on the wall as to serve Altan-Buqa.<sup>17</sup> Such a portrait hall with the images of survived family members does not fit in Confucian tradition. Zhang Jiajia even argues that the statue is not Altan-Buqa but Jesus.<sup>18</sup> Despite the fact that bricked tomb is typically Chinese burial style of the Jin-Yuan era, we cannot rule out the possibility of its belonging to the Christian tradition. A mid-14<sup>th</sup> century example is the monument on the burial of Görgis 闞里吉思 (< Syr. gywrgys) (b. 1281-1286, d. 1335-1340), the so-called Shuzhuanglou “Toilette Tower” 梳妝樓 in Guyuan County 沽源, north of Hebei, which is clearly of Central Asian or Western Asian origin and made of bricks.<sup>19</sup> The portrait hall of Altan-Buqa established in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century might be of some similar elements.

Sauma 騷馬, son of Altan-Buqa, was appointed by the Emperor endorsed with jade seal, the official of the *Yelikewen zhangjiaosi* (欽受聖旨玉寶管[領]也里可溫掌教司官), in charge of Syriac Christians if not all the Christians under the Yuan Dynasty. He rebuilt the *Yelikewen* monasteries (重修也里可溫寺宇) and diligently studied Confucianism, *Yelikewen* Cannons, translation of the Mongolian scripts, *Yin-yang* divination books and a hundred schools of thoughts (其究心儒術、也里可溫經、蒙古字譯語、陰陽方書、諸子百家).<sup>20</sup> The expression of *Yelikewen Cannons* may correspond to the 13th or 14th century Syriac liturgical manuscript found in Peking in the early twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> It again evidences that there were Syriac liturgical texts available for the Christians in North China under the Yuan.

### 3. Yonan (*Yuexiong* 岳雄 *sic.* for *Yuenan* 岳難) of Almaliq

When the 1846 gazetteer copied the text from the steles, the copier had no such knowledge of Syriac, Turkic or Mongolian or the Yuan transcription system that mistakes were unavoidable. In the gazetteer, the name of Altan-Buqa’s grandfather appears three times, all of which reads *Yuexiong* 岳雄. It would make a good Chinese name consisted of a common surname *Yue* and a meaningful given name *Xiong* ‘masculine; powerful; victorious’. The nineteenth copier probably thought that the character *Nan* 難 ‘difficult; disaster; revolt’ is impossible for any Chinese names. In fact, *Nan* 難 was commonly used in the transcription of non-Chinese names during the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The

<sup>17</sup> See: STELE 4 of *Daoguang juyue xianzhi* 1846, 29b.

<sup>18</sup> ZHANG 2010, 49.

<sup>19</sup> SERRUYS 1979. For a review of the debates among contemporary scholars on the identification of Görgis, see DANG 2016, 410-413.

<sup>20</sup> See: STELE 4 in *Daoguang juyue xianzhi* 1846, 30a.

<sup>21</sup> The Peking manuscript is currently preserved in Taipei. See MURAVIEV 2012.

variants for the transcription of the name Yonan (Syriac. Yōnān) include *Yuenan* 月难, *Yaonan* 咬難, and *Yaonan* 藥難.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the text concerning the earliest family history was already incomplete. Fortunately, some important information is still available. Before submitting to Chinggis Qan (r. 1206-1227), Yonan was originally from Almaliq (世為阿里馬里人氏).<sup>22</sup> Almaliq was a center for Syriac Christians. The re-discovered Syriac Christian tombstones in Almaliq<sup>23</sup> highly resemble those from Semirč'e in shape and linguistic features.

Ozar (or Buzar), the Qarluq ruler of Almaliq, went to surrender to Chinggis Qan in or before 1211. Then the Qara Khitai ruler Küchlüg took Ozar in his hunting grounds and put him to death in 1211.<sup>24</sup> Suqnaq (or Siqtaq), son of Ozar, became the ruler of Almaliq and also gave allegiance to Chinggis. When Chinggis marched west in 1219, Suqnaq came with his army.<sup>25</sup> No sources provide information on Yonan's early life in Almaliq. Zhang Jiajia<sup>26</sup> suggests that Yonan probably went to serve Chinggis sometime between 1211 and 1219. Chen Gaohua proposes that Yonan first went to serve Chinggis when he followed Suqnaq in 1219 and took part in the Central Asian campaign.<sup>27</sup> According to STELE 2, Yonan served Chinggis Qan as a bodyguard, and received an imperial edict along with a tiger tablet; he yearly held the imperial decree to enjoin the Qongqirat tribe and took the seat below the Loyal Warrior Prince of Jining [= Alč'in], while all the imperial sons-in-law sat in lower places, and all the great and lesser affairs followed his decisions (入侍密近, 授璽書虎符, 歲時持聖訓諭宏吉烈部, 班濟寧忠武王下, 諸駙馬皆列坐其次, 事無巨細, 一聽裁...) ... As deputy of Alč'in, Yonan commanded the Qongqirat army to conquer Henan. Then he followed the Qongqirat leader to pacificate Liaodong. Later he returned to Songzhou and settled down there. (攝忠武職, 統宏吉烈一軍下河南, 繼從忠武平遼東, 後歸松州, 因家焉.)<sup>28</sup>

The stele emphasizes that Yonan's life was closely related to the Qongqirat tribe and Alč'in, who was given posthumously the title of Loyal Warrior Prince of Jining 濟寧忠武王, known as a *güregen* or *fuma* 駙馬, i.e., "imperial son-in-law".

<sup>22</sup> See: STELE 2 & STELE 5 in *Daoguang juyue xianzhi* 1846, 19b, 22b & 38b.

<sup>23</sup> KOKOVTSOV 1904-1905. NIU 2007. NIU 2008, 57-66.

<sup>24</sup> JUVAINI - BOYLE 1958 (English Translation), 65, 75-76. Cf. LIU 2006, 20-21. For the 1211 dating, see MA 2014, 215-216.

<sup>25</sup> RASHĪD AL-DĪN - SMIRNOVA 1952 (Russian Translation), 198; RASHĪD AL-DĪN - YU & ZHOU 1985 (Chinese Translation), Vol. I, Part 2, 272; RASHĪD AL-DĪN - THACKSTON 1998-1999 (English Translation), 241.

<sup>26</sup> ZHANG 2010, 42.

<sup>27</sup> CHEN 2011, 367.

<sup>28</sup> See: STELE 2 in *Daoguang juyue xianzhi* 1846, 38b.

Before investigating the relationship between Yonan and Alčīn, we should clarify some fact about the Central Asian campaign. The “Biography of Alčīn” in *Yuanshi* mentions that Alčīn took part in capturing Samarqand (取回紇尋斯干城),<sup>29</sup> which was an important event in Chinggis Qan’s Central Asia campaign during 1219-1224. However, various sources attest that Alčīn (alternatively transcription including Anchi 按赤, Ancha 按察, Anzhen 按真 and Anchi 安赤) remained in the east under the command of Muqali (木華黎, 1170-1223) fighting against the Jin from 1218 onwards.<sup>30</sup> Tu Ji (屠寄, 1856-1921) correctly points out that it was impossible for Alčīn to appear in Central Asia.<sup>31</sup> Thus we must dismiss Boyle’s identification of Alčīn with the Alchī Nūyan who was sent into the hill-tracts of Ghūr and Herāt mentioned by Jūzjānī (1193-1260).<sup>32</sup> A better explanation would be that there was another Alčīn. Some of the Qongqirat troops did participate in the Central Asia campaign, their leader was Tuqučar (~Toghačar, ?-1220) who took part in capturing Samarqand.<sup>33</sup> As Christopher Atwood has shown, during the Mongol period, the branches of Qongqirat under different ruling houses were re-organized under the command of the Dei-Sečen—Alčīn family.<sup>34</sup> The “Biography of Alčīn” was compiled in the context that the Alčīn family was the only ruling family of Qongqirat, therefore, it attributes Tuqučar’s part in capturing Samarqand to Alčīn.

If Yonan joined the Central Asian campaign in 1219, his connection with Alčīn would be after 1220 or even later. On the other hand, if Yonan went to Chinggis in ca. 1211, he would almost immediately meet Alčīn who was active in the conquest of the Jurchen Jin Dynasty from 1211 to 1234.<sup>35</sup> As for Yonan and Alčīn’s activities of pacificating Liaodong, Zhang Jiajia argues that it was the Mongol campaign against Korea in 1235.<sup>36</sup> In fact, there were several Mongol military operations in Liaodong. The first was in 1212 when Alčīn commanded the Qongqirat army to Liaodong and reached an alignment with the local warlord

<sup>29</sup> *Yuanshi* 1976 ed., *juan* 119 “Biography of Alčīn 按陳”, 2915.

<sup>30</sup> ZHAO & WANG 1940, 9a (按赤那那). JIA & CHEN 2020, 272 (the year 1218). RASHĪD AL-DĪN - SMIRNOVA 1952, 179; RASHĪD AL-DĪN - YU & ZHOU, 246; RASHĪD AL-DĪN - THACKSTON, 228. See: Zhang Zao 張藻, “Pingshi lianggong zhibei” 評事梁公之碑 [Stele of Mr. Liang], in Li 2004 ed., *Quanyuanwen*, vol. 8, 46 (1219, 按察那延). *Yuanshi* 1976 ed., *juan* 119 “Biography of Muqali”, 2935 (1222, 按赤); *juan* 149 “Biography of Liu Heima” 劉黑馬, 3515-3516 (1224, 按真那延); “Biography of Du Feng 杜豐”, p.3575 (1226, 按赤那延)

<sup>31</sup> TU 1986, 253.

<sup>32</sup> JŪZJĀNĪ - RAVERTY 1888-1889 (English Translation), 1048. BOYLE 1963, 238.

<sup>33</sup> JUVAINI - BOYLE 1958 (English Translation), 174, n. 11. Rashīd al-Dīn - XETAGUROV 1952 (Russian Translation), Part I, vol. 1, 163; RASHĪD AL-DĪN - YU & ZHOU 1985 (Chinese Translation), 266. RASHĪD AL-DĪN - SMIRNOVA 1952 (Russian Translation), Part I, vol. 2, 163, 177, 190, 209, 214, 217, 220, 254, 255; RASHĪD AL-DĪN - YU & ZHOU 1985, 226, 244, 261, 287, 295, 299, 302, 348, 349.

<sup>34</sup> ATWOOD 2014.

<sup>35</sup> An early mention of Alčīn conquering the Jin Dynasty in 1231, see JIA & CHEN 2020, 231.

<sup>36</sup> ZHANG 2010, 42. f.n, 7

Yelü Liuge 耶律留哥 to fight against the Jin Dynasty<sup>37</sup> Later Alč'in was likely to commit Liaodong military operations headed by the Left-Wing Princes and Muqali until late 1220s. But it seems that Alč'in did not participate in the campaigns after 1231.

Songzhou was originally the Songshan County 松山縣 and was renamed "Songzhou" in 1262. The stele uses the later name. In 1214, Chinggis Qan re-allocated residences to Qongqirat rulers. Songzhou belonged to the dominion of Alč'in's son Sorqodu (唆魯火都, 唆兒火都), adjacent to Alč'in's residence in modern Keshikten 克什克騰 and Ongniud.<sup>38</sup> Considering that the stele was written in ca. 1295, four decades after Yonan's death, unavoidable exaggeration and simplicity gave rise to the difficulties to identify some exact time points. But it seems most likely that in the 1210s and 1220s Yonan took part in the conquests of the Jin Dynasty and Liaodong.

#### 4. Yonan of Almaliq and the Chifeng Brick

In a footnote, Zhang Jiajia speculates a possible link between the gazetteer and the Chifeng brick, but hesitates due to the reading of the name Yuexiong.<sup>39</sup> Besides the emendation from Yuexiong to Yuenan mentioned above, I propose four more reasons for this identification.

First of all, the location Songzhou connects the two. Yonan of Almaliq settled down in Songzhou. The Chifeng brick was found inside the Songzhou ruin. According to a Chinese stele, Altan-Buqa's wife Lady Xin 辛氏 was buried in Songzhou.<sup>40</sup> It is worth noting that traditionally Chinese people prefer to be buried in the wildness, and it is not unusual for Christians to be buried inside the city wall. It can be confirmed by the Öng'üt Christian tombstones found inside the ruin of Olun Süme, Inner Mongolia.<sup>41</sup>

Secondly, the age matches. Yonan of the Chifeng brick died in 1253 at the age of seventy-one. It can be estimated that his birth year was 1183. It makes good sense that Yonan of Almaliq went to serve Chinggis and went with the Qongqirat on campaigns in North China in his thirties and forties. Yonan's grandson Altan-Buqa died in 1322 at an age between eighty and eighty-nine according to the incomplete Chinese text (年八十[?]).<sup>42</sup> Thus Altan-Buqa was born sometime between 1234 and 1243 when the grandfather Yonan aged between fifty-two and

<sup>37</sup> *Yuanshi* 1976 ed, *juan* 149 "Biography of Yelü Liuge", 3511.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, *juan* 119 "Biography of Dei-Sečen 特薛禪", 2919. For the geography of the Qongqirat residences, see YANAI 1930, 600-603, 606.

<sup>39</sup> ZHANG 2010, 44-45, f.n. 7.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. STELE 4 in *Daoguang juyue xianzhi* 1846, 29a.

<sup>41</sup> EGAMI 2000, 24-34.

<sup>42</sup> STELE 3 in *Daoguang juyue xianzhi* 1846, 25b.



sixty-one, which is quite reasonable.

Thirdly, the political and social status fits. The Chifeng glazed brick requires exquisite ceramic craft and neat writings in Syriac and Old Uighur, which make it the only such kind of item not only among Christian tombstones but also among all contemporary ceramics. It indicates the eminent authority of the deceased. Yonan of Almaliq took the position after the Qongqirat leader, indicating that he was actually the highest official appointed by Chinggis Qan in the Qingqirat tribe. Since Qubilai's reign, such official position was called *Wangxiang* 王相 "Prince's Chancellor", *Wangfu* 王傅 "Prince's Tutor", or *Neishi* 內史 "Court Superintendent" in Chinese sources. The Yuan Dynasty established the Office of *Wangfu* 王傅府 for Qongqirat.<sup>43</sup> There must have been a corresponding non-Chinese term. Uighur *Ordu igäsi* in the fourth line of the Chifeng brick is the Turkic form. Hamilton and Niu's transcription and interpretation is *Ordu igäzi* "le maître de ce palais" [master of the palace]. In Turkic and Mongolian languages, *Ordu* "royal encampment; residence of the sovereign; palace" stands for the military, political, and economic center. The word *igäsi* might be a variant of *ügäsi*. In the Uighur Empire, there was a title called *el ügäsi* (or *il ügäsi*) (頡于迦斯, 頡于伽思) "advisor of the realm", interpreted in Chinese as *Zaixiang* 宰相 "Chancellor", *Daxiang* 大相 "prime minister" or *Guoxiang* 國相 "Chancellor of the State".<sup>44</sup> Since *el* means "realm, state, nation", it can be assumed that *ordu ügäsi* refers to "Chancellor of the Ordu", equivalent to the Chancellor or Superintendent to the prince of the Qongqirat tribe. It fits well with the post of Yonan of Almaliq that "yearly held the imperial decree to enjoin the Qongqirat tribe, and he took the seat below the Loyal Warrior Prince of Jining [= Alč'in], while all the imperial sons-in-law sat in lower places, and all the great and lesser affairs followed his decisions." (STELE 2). This is confirmed by STELE 3 which states:

Since the Sacred Dynasty had allied with the Qongqirat [through marriages], [...] in four seasons [Yonan] assembled all of them and recited the sacred decree aloud, and he took the seat below Alč'in the imperial son-in-law and higher than all the other imperial sons-in-law (聖朝既與宏吉烈氏約... 聖訓, 四時聚其衆讀示, 戒(?)按[陳]駙馬下、諸駙馬上).<sup>45</sup>

The Qongqirat is famous for the marriage alliance with the Chinggisid. The stele here fits the records in the *Yuanshi* that recounts, in 1237, there was an edict stating that the Qongqirat leader's daughter shall always be the empress and his son shall always marry a princess, and in the first month of every season they shall listen to the recitation of this edict, from generation to generation.<sup>46</sup> Since

<sup>43</sup> *Yuanshi* 1976 ed. *juan* 119 "Biography of Dei-Sečen 特薛禪", 2920.

<sup>44</sup> CLAUSON 1972, 101. Cf. RYBATZKI 2006, 65-68; KASAI 2012, 89.

<sup>45</sup> STELE 3 in *Daoguang juyue xianzhi* 1846, 23b.

<sup>46</sup> *Yuanshi* 1976 ed., *juan* 118 "Biography of Alč'in 按陳", 2915.

Yonan was with Qongqirat no later than the early 1220s, the practice of routine recitation of the marriage alliance edict must have existed long before 1237. Probably Ögedei Qa'an (r. 1229-41) reaffirmed the edict in that year.

At last, the title *kümkä sänggüm* corresponds to that in the Chinese stele. Hamilton and Niu's transcription *köm[ä]k[k]ä*, the dative of *kömäk* "troupes auxiliaires ou de réserve" and interpretation of *köm[ä]k[k]ä sänggüm* as "commandant affecté aux troupes auxiliaires"<sup>47</sup> is not satisfactory. The *kümkä* is attested in a piece of contemporary Old Uighur ink inscription (Text C) on the east wall of the south window on the third floor of the White Pagoda of Hohhota published by Bai Yudong and Matsui Dai who correctly pointed out its etymology Syriac *qwmky'* (qūmkāyā), a variant of *qwnky'* "sacristan, doorkeeper (of church)".<sup>48</sup> In the Chinese stele, Yonan of Almaliq assisted Chinggis and was conferred the post of [ku/gu]-mu-ge, and wearing a golden tiger tablet (佐太祖, 特授[?]睦哥職事, 配金虎符).<sup>49</sup> We can identify the Chinese transcription of *kümkä* with [ku/gu]-mu-ge. The first character lost for ku/gu- could be 苦, 窟, 古 etc. Meanwhile, the golden tiger tablet indicates that he was commander of a troop, corresponding to the title *sänggüm* (< Chinese *jiangjun* 將軍).<sup>50</sup> Chen Gaohua argues that the golden tiger tablet is a mistake for golden tablet because the golden tiger tablet was for the commander of ten thousand and Yonan's grandson Altan-Buqa held a golden tablet. In my point of view, Altan-Buqa turned into a civil official when Qubilai Qa'an weakened the power of princes. As Yonan acted as deputy to command the Qongqirat troops, it was still possible for him to hold a golden tiger tablet.

In conclusion, Yonan of the Chifeng brick can be identified with Yonan of Almaliq. Chinggis Qan appointed him as the chancellor or superintendent to the prince of the Qongqirat tribe. After Yonan died in 1253, his son Bäküs 别古思 succeeded his post.<sup>51</sup> Yonan's grandson Altan-Buqa moved to Jinning in 1273. His descendants were active in political and in religious affairs until late Yuan. The identity of the Yonan family was connected to Christianity and to Almaliq. The Yuan government would categorize them as *Yelikewen*, so that their original ethnicity did not matter.

Thus, the English translation of the Old Uighur inscription of the Chifeng brick would be:

<sup>47</sup> HAMILTON & NIU 1994, 152-153.

<sup>48</sup> BAI & MATSUI 2016, 35-36. SIMS-WILLIAMS 2016, 346. SOKOLOFF 2009, 1337 & 1385. Cf. BORBONE 2008, 177.

<sup>49</sup> STELE 4 in *Daoguang juyue xianzhi* 1846, 28a.

<sup>50</sup> BAI & MATSUI 2016, 34-35, f.n. 6.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. STELE 3; STELE 5.

Emperor Alexandrian year of one thousand six hundred and sixty-four, Chinese year of the Ox, the twentieth of the first moon, the chancellor of the palace (*ordu*) Yonan, sacristan and commander, at the age of seventy-one fulfilled the will of God. May the soul of this lord take place in heavenly eternal paradise!

### 5. Appendix: Reconstruction of the Syro-Uighur Personal Names

To reconstruct the original forms, it is necessary to amend some corrupted Chinese characters due to the damage in the steles and the nineteenth century copier's lack of knowledge of Non-Chinese languages or Yuan transcription system. Note that the youngest generation can only be found on the fragmental verso of STELE 5.<sup>52</sup> This list is based on my previous discussions (MA 2016). Roman numerations stand for the generations. For example, Roman numeral I means the first generation of the family.

I:

岳雄 Yuexiong *sic.* for 岳難 Yuenan < Uig. Yonan < Syr. ywnn (Yōnān)

II:

別古思 Biegusi < Uig. Bäküs < Syr. bkws (Bakōs)

III:

按檀不花 Antanbuhua < Uig. Altan-Buqa

IV:

變德古思 Biandegusi *sic.* for 變理吉思 Xielijisi < Uig. Särgis < Syr. srgyws (Sargīs)

騷馬 Saoma < Uig. Sauma < Syr. šwm' (Šaumā)

錄碩霸 Lushuoba *sic.* for 保碩霸 Baoshuoba < Uig. Baršaba < Syr. bršb' (Barshabbā)

岳出謀 Yuechumou < Uig. \*Yočmut < Syr. ywšmd (Yōšmud)

業里通瓦 Yelitongwa < Uig. El-tonga “nation hero/leopard”

伯顏帖木兒 Boyantiemuer < Uig. Bayan-Temür

岳忽難 Yuehunan < Uig. Yoxnan < Syr. ywḥnn (Yōḥnān)

山柱 Shanzhu “mountain pillar” or < Mong. Salji'ut “name of a Mongol tribe”

V.

塔海 Tahai < Uig. Taqai

密聶傑 Miniejie < ?

買住 Maizhu “bought”

留住 Liuzhu “retained”

昔里瓦 Xiliwa < Syr. Šliḥā

斡珥 Nuer < Syr. nwḥ (Nōḥ)

薛里吉思(~薛理吉思) Xuelijisi < Särgis < Syr. srgys (Sargīs)

七十八 Qishiba “seventy-eight” [female]

孛羅帖木兒 Boluotiemuer < Uig. Bolod-Temür “iron steel”

<sup>52</sup> See: MA 2020.

普慶 Puqing “universal celebration”

VI.

昔里瓦 Xiliwa < Syr. Šliḥā

秋蟬 Qiuchan “Autumn cicada” [female]

霍耳彌思 Huoermisi < Syr. Hormīzd

锁住奴 Suozhunu “chained slave”

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## NEW FINDS OF COINS AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL OBJECTS WITH CHRISTIAN SYMBOLS FROM SUGHD AND CHACH

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Data from written sources on the problem of the beginning of Christianity in Transoxiana and the rare archaeological finds have been investigated by orientalist and archaeologists.<sup>1</sup> The first collection of articles on the history of Christianity in Central Asia was published in 1994. It includes 13 articles by 15 authors informing about archaeological and numismatic research related to Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Many illustrations from the articles of the collection was used by A. Gritsina without reference to the primary sources.<sup>3</sup>

However, new finds confirming the Christians' arrival in Transoxiana remained largely unknown until recently. After 2010, many new artifacts with Christian symbols have been recorded, both in Sughd near Varakhsha and from its surroundings, Paikend, and in Chach (Kanka settlement, Mayskiy village).

In Central Asia there are coins that are not traditional of local mints. They are round and have a square hole in the center. This form of coins in Sughd appears as a result of close trade and economic ties with China in the 7th and 8th centuries. Under the influence of China, Chinese type of coins with a square hole appeared in Sughd, which were called pseudo-Tang in the literature. There is a Christian symbolism in the form of two types of crosses in this series of pseudo-Tang coins. To understand the time when Christian symbols appeared on coins and the place of their minting, it is necessary to consider the development of the entire series. An analysis of the iconography of coins by the type of the Tang minting showed the following changes, which is related to the chronology of their issues, in my opinion. At first, they imitate the Chinese characters (Kai yuan tong bao) clearly enough. Then imitations of the Chinese coins "Kai yuan tong bao" became more and more distant from prototypes: their outlines became blurred, their individual details merged. Further, the Chinese characters in the regions of Eastern and Western Sughd were replaced by coins with Sogdian legends, which convey the title and name of the rulers of Sughd. In Bukhara Sughd, imitations of coins with

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<sup>1</sup> BARTOLD 1963; BARTOLD 1966; ANBOEV1959; DRESVYANSKAYA 1968; 1974; NIKITIN 1984; ALBAUM 1994; ZHELEZNYAKOV 2010; RASPOPOVA 2014.

<sup>2</sup> *The history of ancient cults of Central Asia* 1994.

<sup>3</sup> GRITSINA 2018.



a square hole have their own characteristics and, in my opinion, reflect precisely the initial stage of the appearance of pseudo-Tang coins.

It is known that in 621 in China a new type of bronze coin "Kai yuan tong bao" was issued - "the coin of the beginning of the reign in circulation". This type of new coin became widespread outside China in the entire world that was economically connected with it and was in use in China for more than 1200 years.<sup>4</sup> It is not yet known where the very first coins with non-blurring outlines of hieroglyphs were issued. Until recently, there was no information on the localization of coins of the Tang type with the Bukhara *tamga* on the reverse side.<sup>5</sup> However, new finds in the vicinity of the settlement of Varakhsha, Paikend made it possible to localize them within Western Sughd.<sup>6</sup>

In Bukhara Sughd, there are known finds of the "Kai yuan tong bao" coins. It should be noted that from the beginning of the minting of pseudo-Tang coins in the monetary circulation of Sughd, a new technique for making coins appeared – casting. This technique in Western Sughd appears under the influence of Tang-China. The typology of the coins of Bukhara Sughd with a square hole has been partially published, but their classification has not been fully developed. On the basis of the new finds from the vicinity of the Varakhsha settlement, for the museum collections of the State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan and archaeological finds from the settlement of Paikend, as well as the collections of the Samarkand State Museum of History and Culture of Uzbekistan, a classification of coins was developed according to the type of pseudo-Tang coins for Bukhara Sughd. The beginning of minting of pseudo-Tang coins in Bukhara Sughd can be dated to the time of China's recognition of the power by the Western Turks in 657-659.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the appearance of coins made by using the casting technique according to the Tang coinage type can be dated to the second half of the 7th century, and their subsequent issues to the second half of the 7th and, probably, the beginning of the 8th century.

### **Classification of Coins by the Type of Tang Coinage**

#### *Type I. Coins of the Tang type with clear hieroglyphs.*

- Front - on the sides of the square hole there are 4 Chinese characters (Kai yuan tong bao), framed by a thick rim.
- Back - no images. There is a thin rim along the edges of the square hole, there is a thick rim along the edge of the coin.

GMIUZ (Uzbekistan State Museum of History).

N-462/21. W. 3.98 g., D. 24.8x25 mm. (Pic. 1, 1; Pic. 2, 1)

<sup>4</sup> BYKOV 1969, 18; SMIRNOVA 1981, 36.

<sup>5</sup> SMIRNOVA 1981, 35.

<sup>6</sup> MUSAKAEVA 2014, 167, Table 41-44; SAPAROV & OMELCHENKO 2017, Fig. 8, no. 9-11.

<sup>7</sup> GOIBOV 1989, 22.

GE (State Hermitage) 34829.

*Type II. Tang type coins with blurry hieroglyphs and Bukhara tamga.*

- Front - on the sides of the square hole there are blurred outlines of 4 Chinese characters (Kai yuan tong bao), framed by a thick rim.
- Back - on the side of the square hole, there is a built-in Bukhara type tamga with a square in the center and slightly rounded branches extending from each corner. There is a thick rim along the edge of the coin.

There are five copies of coins of this type from the collection of GMIUZ.

- N-462/17 W.-3.63g. D.-24 mm.;
- N-462/22 W.3.98g. D. 24.8x25; (Pic. 3.2)
- N-462/23 W. 2.81g. D. 23.4x23.7mm.; (Pic. 3, 3)
- N-462/24 W. 3.82 g. D. 25.2x25.4mm. (Pic. 2.2; Pic. 3.4)

Another 11 copies of coins of this type come from the private collection of A. Nurullaev, they were found in the vicinity of Varakhsha. Three copies of coins of this type were found at the Paikend settlement.<sup>8</sup> There are 19 coins of this type in total.

*Type III. Coins of the Tang type with blurry hieroglyphs and "y" - shaped tamga and a short Sogdian inscription.*

- Front - highly distorted, blurred images of the Chinese characters on the sides of the square hole, around a thick-lined rim.
- Back - to the left of the square hole there is a "y" - shaped tamga, the lower branch is bent to the right towards the square hole, the two upper ones diverge to the sides. To the right of the square hole is a short Sogdian legend clockwise.

There are 6 coins of this type in total: 1 copy. from the private collection of A. Nurullaev from the vicinity of Varakhsha; 1 copy kept in the Samarkand Museum - CI H 633; in the State Hermitage 4 copies - GE 34832; GE 9494 (Penjikent); GE 34833; GE KP 583/1956 (Afrasiab).

*Type IV. Coins with a square hole with Nestorian crosses.*

- Front - from the top of the square hole, framed by a relief rim, there is a Sogdian legend of three characters: "PY / T". Below the square hole there is a Sogdian legend of three characters: "KND". To the right of the square hole is the Bukhara tamga in the form of a circle with four branches, two at the top and bottom, to the left is a Chinese hieroglyph in the form of the letter "π" with a horizontal stroke above the top cap. There is a linear band around it.
- Back - to the right and to the left of the square hole, framed by an embossed rim, one Nestorian cross is depicted.

<sup>8</sup> SAPAROV & OMELCHENKO 2017, Pic. 8, no. 9,10,11.

There are 4 copies of coins of this type: one from the collection of the State Museum of Fine Arts N-462/18, W. 1.92g.; D. 17.5x17.2 mm., Three other coins were found in the vicinity of Varakhsha (private collection of A. Nurullaev).

According to V.A. Livshits on the coins with a square hole, found during excavations of Paikend, there is an inscription from one word: "ptknδ" - "patkanδ", which conveys the name of the settlement of Paikend. He dates the coins to the last quarter of the 7th century.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, V.A. Livshits does not present a photo or a more detailed description of these coins. In my opinion, he was referring specifically to the coins of type IV with Nestorian crosses. Moreover, in the inscription of these coins he sees a Bukhara script, similar to the inscription on a silver jug with the image of the figures of priestesses under the arches from the Perm region.

*Type V. Coins with a square hole and two Bukhara tamgas.*

- Front - Above the square hole, there is a Sogdian legend of three characters: "γwβ". Below there is a cross - sign "shi" - "10", to the right and to the left of the square hole, one Bukhara *tamga* in the form of a circle with 4 branches - two above and two below. The rim is thick-linear. Embossed rim around the square hole.
- Back - without images, embossed rim around the square hole.

There are 9 known coins of this type, one copy of which is kept in the collection of the State Museum of Fine Arts N-462/19. W. 1.47g.; D. 17 mm. The rest were found in the vicinity of the Varakhsha settlement (private collection of A. Nurullaev).

For the coins of II and III types, the prototype of the Chinese pseudo-Tang coins is quite clear - the coins "Kai yuan tong bao", the coins of these types have the same hieroglyphs as the prototype, only with slightly less distinct outlines. Coins of types IV and V do not have such hieroglyphs, from the Chinese prototype only a hieroglyph in the shape of the letter π with a horizontal stroke above the top cap (type IV) and a cross located below the square hole (type V) remained. The cross conveys the image of the figure "10". It is found quite often on the coins of China, both the early and later periods.<sup>10</sup> They are much smaller in size.

The weight of coins of the first type is 3.98g. Weight of coins of the second type: W.-3.63g.; W. 3.98g.; W. 2.81 g; W. 3.82g. Weight of coins of the fourth type: W. 1.92g. Weight of coins of the fifth type: W. 1.47g. The weight of coins of the fourth and fifth types is almost two times heavier than the weight of coins of the previous types, which probably indicates two denominations of coins of this series.

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<sup>9</sup> LIVSHITS & LUKONIN 1964, 167.

<sup>10</sup> MOSHNYAGIN & ZHUK 1967, 15, Table 4.

The Bukhara *tamga* is a constant element of all imitative minting of coins of this group, except for coins of the third type. The *tamga* on coins of the third type has a Y-shaped form and is probably of Samarkand origin. Judging by the places of finds: the settlement of Penjikent, Afrasiab, this coin can be localized in the Samarkand Sughd. Another copy from the Samarkand Museum confirms my assumption, because most often museums replenished their collections at the expense of local finds. One specimen from the vicinity of Varakhsha may indicate trade contacts between Western and Eastern Sughd. Thus, the types of coins with a square hole and with a constant element - a hieroglyph in the form of "π" with a small stroke above the top cap should be allocated to group I, the second group will include coins with the sign "shi" - "10", the sign probably cannot transfer the denomination of coins, as on Chinese prototypes. From the prototype that preceded it, only the yuan sign remained. There is no smooth transition from the prototype coins to coins of the fourth and fifth types. There is no picture of the gradual distortion of hieroglyphs, they are almost completely, except for one sign, replaced by Sogdian symbols - Sogdian legend signs, Bukhara *tamga* on the obverse and a completely new cult symbol for coins with a square hole - two Christian crosses on the sides of the square hole. The presence of Christian symbols reflects not only close trade and economic, but also most of all the cultural and historical relationship between Western Sughd and Tang China.

A series of much earlier coins depicting a lion, a deer, and Nestorian crosses from Western Sughd record the movement of the Christian faith here from Merv and later from Iran. Christians probably lived in Bukhara Sughd, who minted coins with crosses and sacred animals. Christian pilgrims traveled through Bukhara Sughd to China together with trade caravans. And already in the 7th or the 8th century these symbols returned to the Sogdian coins of Bukhara Sughd again, but this time indirectly through imitations of the Tang coins.

The question of dating the described coins according to the Tang type is complicated; there are no exact data on their finding in strictly dated archaeological layers. Coins of the Tang type of the second and fifth types were found at the Paikend settlement in the layers in the middle of the 8th century. However, in the composition of the finds of coins from this settlement, in my opinion, there are earlier coins - these are two copies of imitations of the coins of Asbar of the first generation with Sogdian legends distorted beyond recognition and distorted *tamga*, which appear before the pseudo-Tang coins. The presence of different types of coins with a square hole in Bukhara Sughd and Samarkand suggests that politically these were two different regions. Data from written sources, in particular, documents from Mount Mug, can serve as confirmation. So, the Samarkand Treaty of 712 says that the Sogdian king, except for Samarkand and its surroundings, owned Kesh and Nesefer with all their lands.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> SMIRNOVA 1963, 26.

Bukhara is not mentioned in this agreement. Consequently, Bukhara Sughd in 712, as well as in the earlier period, remained independent from Samarkand Sughd. This is confirmed by the coins of the pseudo-Tang coinage, both with Bukhara *tamga* and with Nestorian crosses and the sign "shi".

The flourishing of the trading activity of the Sogdians should be attributed to the 7th century, the time when Sogdiana was under the control of the Turks. The type of round coin with a square hole appeared on the territory of Central Asia and, in particular, among the Sogdians, in the 7th century, that is, almost immediately after they were adopted as a type of national Chinese coin (621 AD). At the same time, closer trade relations were established between China and Sogdiana.<sup>12</sup> Finds of coins of the first and second types (with Chinese hieroglyphs and their distortions in addition to the Bukhara *tamga* on the back) at the Paikend settlement in the layers of the middle of the 8th-century indicate that this type of coins could survive to this time. However, the coins of this appearance, in my opinion, are earlier – the second half of the 7th century. This is evidenced by earlier archaeological finds, in particular a hum with a Sogdian inscription drawn from the settlement of Paikend, where the signs are written separately, and not in italics. Paikend's numismatic material is divided, in my opinion, into an earlier (6th - 7th centuries) and a later (7th - 8th centuries). So, according to the presented classification and archaeological research, coins with blurred hieroglyphs can be dated to the beginning of the second half of the 7th century. Considering the image of a lion on the coins of Chach and Otrar, O.I. Smirnova points to the existence of coins depicting a lion and a cross from Bukhara Sughd, but she did not provide any images of the coins, weight information, data on their typology or dating.<sup>13</sup> V.A. Livshits, examining the Sogdian inscriptions in Bukhara script and referring to V. Henning, cites the reading of the legend on Bukhara coins with a square hole, found during the excavations of Paikend. This is the emission of the rulers of Paikend, proof of this is the inscription on these coins from one word: "ptknδ" = "patkanθ" - "Paikend". But images of these inscriptions and the coins themselves are not given.<sup>14</sup> Of all the coins with a square hole mentioned by V.A. Livshits and V. Henning, small coins from the vicinity of Varakhsha are most suitable for the description given by these researchers. On one side to the right and to the left of the square hole there are Nestorian crosses, on the other side to the right of the square hole there is a Bukhara *tamga*, on the left is a Chinese hieroglyph in the form of the letter "π". Above is a three-letter word, and another three-letter word below. The word "ptknδ" is not acceptable for this coin, because in total, not five, but six signs are clearly visible on the described coins - "P'Y / TKNδ" (see Pic. 1, 2).

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<sup>12</sup> SMIRNOVA 1939, 117-120.

<sup>13</sup> SMIRNOVA 1981, 58.

<sup>14</sup> LIVSHITS 1964, 167; HENNING 1968, 52.

A rare and small early group of coins of Western Sughd make up the coins with images of animals and crosses. The series is small and their interpretation is considered by researchers in different ways. Particularly acute is the question of dating and local affiliation within Bukhara Sughd. There are no reliable sources with a firmly established date about the time of the appearance of the first Christians in Sughd. However, material from the settlement of Varakhsha and from its surroundings points directly to a rather early date of Christianity finding its way there. It is known that already in 301 Christianity was declared the state religion in Armenia. The images of crosses on medieval coins of Armenia are rich in traditional Christian symbols - crosses with flared ends, images of lions in heraldic poses. The shape of the crosses is similar to the images of crosses on much earlier coins of Western Sughd (Pic. 12,13).

On the territory of Merv, the Haroba-Koshuk church was opened in Old Merv, dating from the 5th-6th centuries.<sup>15</sup> In addition, G. Y. Dresvyanskaya noted that the Arab sources mention priest Beresia, who arrived in Merv 200 years after Christ. This fact, in her opinion, is confirmed by official synodal documents - in 334 the Bishop of Merv took part in the Synod. This means that already in the first quarter of the 4th century the contingent of Christians was significant.<sup>16</sup>

V.D. Goryacheva believes that the presence of Christians in Central Asia is known even at an earlier time.<sup>17</sup> In my opinion, these earlier finds include coins with images of animals on one side and crosses on the reverse (Pic. 12,13). It is believed that under Shapur I (240 - c. 272), as well as under Shapur II (383 - 388), there were persecutions against Christians. Iranian Christians belonged to various sects of the Eastern or Syrian Church.<sup>18</sup> The Kartir inscription mentions Christian sects, religious movements expelled by the high priest of Iran from the lands subject to him.<sup>19</sup> It is quite probable that the advancement of both Christians at such an early time - the 3rd-4th centuries, and the Manichaeans in the 4th century - is possible to the vicinity of Varakhsha. Indeed, already in the first quarter of the 3rd century in Merv, the above-mentioned priest Beresia who arrived in Merv 200 years after Christ was known. The early dates are also supported by the iconographic analysis carried out on the early groups of coins with the image of a camel and coins with crosses. The technique of making coins, the style of depicting animals is realistic down to the smallest details, the style of small-dotted rims indicates an early date, presumably the end of the 3rd - 4th centuries. However, it should be noted that the forms of crosses on coins and medallions of Varakhsha and its environs are of different types:

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<sup>15</sup> PUGACHENKOVA 1954.

<sup>16</sup> DRESVYANSKAYA 1974, 178.

<sup>17</sup> GORYACHEVA 1988, 73.

<sup>18</sup> NIKITIN 1984, 121.

<sup>19</sup> LUKONIN 1969, 87.

Type-1. It is cross is shaped like a four-petal flower, the leaves of which taper towards the center.

Type-2. It is a cross in the form of four triangles, with the top looking at one point - the center of the cross.

Type-3. It is a slightly larger cross in the form of one strip superimposed on the second with widened outer edges.

Type-4. It is a late cross on Calvary with perpendicularly overlapping three ends of the strokes with dots along the edges.

This variety of crosses indicates different dates. Thus, medallions with a cross on Calvary, by analogy with the coins of Byzantium, can be dated to a somewhat later time than coins depicting realistic animals. Similar crosses on Calvary are known for coins of Byzantium, starting from the 6th century (of the emperors Tiberius II) and further in a later period (Heraclius and others). For the 5th century, crosses of type 3 are known, they are known by the coins of Theodosius.

In 635 the Nestorians missionaries entered China along the Silk Road.<sup>20</sup> So, probably, from Sughd, Christian preachers arrived in China, and already at a later time in the 7th - 8th centuries from China to Sughd. It is no coincidence that during the period of the most intense ties with China in the 7th - 8th centuries Christian symbols - crosses - were affixed on the Sogdian coinage with a square hole, which appeared on the type of Chinese coins.

However, materials are known indicating that from earlier times from the 4th century Christians lived in the vicinity of Varakhsha and, perhaps, they did not leave at a later time, which is what the medallions of the 6th-7th (?) centuries with Christian symbols are about (Pic. 13.4). Therefore, in the 7th–8th centuries in Bukhara Sughd crosses appeared on coins with a square hole. The iconography of early coins is replete with Christian symbols. There are many coins depicting various animals in Sughd in the early Middle Ages – a horse, a two-humped camel, a deer, an elephant, a lion (Pic. 12; Pic. 13). “The lion becomes the emblem of Jesus Christ, the emblem of the Old Testament’s Judas, from whose family Jesus Christ comes.<sup>21</sup> “The lion is one of the favorite animals of the Christian “symbolic menagerie”.<sup>22</sup> In ancient times it was believed that the lion sleeps with open eyes. Accordingly, he symbolized vigilance, spiritual strength. In Christianity, the roar of a lion is likened to the word of God.<sup>23</sup>

The image of the elephant is associated with the coinage of the rulers of Ustrushana. The image of the elephant itself, according to O.I. Smirnov, - the

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<sup>20</sup> ZHELEZNYAKOV 2010, 267-268.

<sup>21</sup> IVANOV & TOPOROV 1982, 42.

<sup>22</sup> SOKOLOV 1982, 42-43.

<sup>23</sup> BAESHKO & GORDIENKO 2007, 47.

Indian emblem of Ganesh, the Shaiva elephant-like god.<sup>24</sup> The deer in religious beliefs personified the symbol of fertility. It is believed that its ability to shed horns was associated with cycles of rebirth, eternal youth and longevity. It is believed that the deer personified spiritual thirst, religious zeal and piety. In the Christian tradition, the deer was an attribute of the patrons of hunters.<sup>25</sup>

The Turks, captured by the Byzantines in the battle of Balyarat in 591, had a cross tattoo on their foreheads and explained that this was done on the advice of Christians in order to avoid a pestilence.<sup>26</sup> Narshakhi mentions the Vardankhudat dynasty, during the reign of which the city of Shapurkan (modern Shafirkan) was founded within Western Sughd. It was an independent principality, not subject to the Bukharhudats, which had its own lands. It is likely that Christians lived in the Vardanzi area, who came together with the Sassanid prince expelled from Iran. This fact could not have taken place in the history of Western Sughd if the Bukhara ruler did not patronize Christian beliefs. This event could have happened in the 4th century, or 4th -5th centuries (or in the 5th-6th centuries), this is how Sassanid coins are dated with a countermark with a Bukhara *tamga*. The main finds of Sassanid coins with a countermark in the form of a Bukhara *tamga* are localized in Bukhara Sughd, including a hoard from Shafirkan.<sup>27</sup> The issue of coins with a lyre-shaped sign is associated with the influence of the Sassanids.<sup>28</sup>

### Eastern Sughd

Considering coins with a square hole not only from Bukhara Sughd, but also from Samarkand, it should be noted that already in the first half of the 7th century, a local bronze coin of the Chinese model, issued on behalf of the ruler of Penjikent, prevailed in Penjikent. Coins of Shishpir of the second quarter of the 7th century were circulated simultaneously with the coins of Penjikent, and coins of Turgar from the middle of the 8th century.<sup>29</sup> For the coins of Varhuman, O.I. Smirnova determines the upper limit of the coins of Varhuman to be AD 657 when this Sogdian ikhshid was approved by the Vann after the victory of Tang China over the Turks. From that time on, the type of coin of the Tang sample became the leading one until the third quarter of the 8th century, when it was replaced by the Arab coinage.<sup>30</sup>

Although coins with the image of crosses are also known for the neighboring regions such as Samarkand Sughd, Ustrushana and Khorezm, separate finds of coins have been published; various types have been identified; sketches and

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<sup>24</sup> SMIRNOVA 1981, 32.

<sup>25</sup> BAESHKO & GORDIENKO 2007, 52-55.

<sup>26</sup> GUMILEV 1967b, 5-10; ZHELEZNYAKOV 2010, 267.

<sup>27</sup> MUSAKAEVA 1994, 49.

<sup>28</sup> SMIRNOVA 1983, 25.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 1963, 20.

<sup>30</sup> SMIRNOVA 1963, 42.



rarely, photos are provided.<sup>31</sup> For the first time E.V. Rtveladze and S.S. Tashkhodzhaev showed a coin with the image of a cross, but for Chach.<sup>32</sup>

Coins of this series with a cross and animals became the object of the author's research in the 80s and 90s, when the coins from the vicinity of Varakhsha and the collections of the collector A.E. Ivkova became available for research.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, a summary was made of all coins known by that time with the image of a cross from Bukhara Sughd, Tashkent oasis, Khorezm and Otrar.<sup>34</sup> The uniqueness of this series is that it clearly features Christian symbols. A total of 12 specimens of coins were recorded depicting sacred animals and Nestorian crosses. According to the finds, all of them are located in the area of the Varakhsha settlement. Some of them are from the Varakhshinsky collection, collected in the course of many years of research by V.A. Shishkin at the Varakhsha settlement and its surroundings, others - from the private collection of a resident of Bukhara A.E. Ivkov and collector A. Nurullaev, who found them in the vicinity of the same Varakhsha.<sup>35</sup> In addition to Western Sughd, coins with the image of crosses were noted in Eastern Sughd and in Ustrushan.

In 1968, in Afrasiab, in the same horizon with the coins of the Sogdian king Shishpir, a coin was found, which is unlike the rest of the coins of this series. Two crosses were applied on both sides of the character's head as an additional element. This feature, according to the research by E.V. Rtveladze and S. Tashkhodzhaev, and after them by O.I. Smirnova, is a consequence of the influence of Byzantine monetary iconography on the iconography of Sughd coins.<sup>36</sup> The Christian symbol in the form of a small equal-pointed cross is found on another series of coins of Eastern Sughd. On the obverse, a character is depicted with a barely noticeable three-quarter turn to the left, in an unusual headdress - double, hoop-shaped, hemispherical, freely covering the head, covering the ears.<sup>37</sup> On the reverse side there is a lyre-like sign - *tamga*, and next to it is a Nestorian cross and signs of the italic Sogdian legend. The signs, in our opinion, represent an earlier italic font than on other coins of this series. In this regard, this type of coins may date from the 6th century. O.I. Smirnova, having analyzed the coins of the group with a lyre-shaped sign, came to the conclusion that they were accompanied by the inscriptions: "prn / βγγ / δ' r" or "prn / βγγ / n' r" - "keeper (of fire) Farnbag", possibly "prn / βγγ / N'R" - "Farnbag's Fire". In

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<sup>31</sup> RTVELADZE, TASHKHODZHAEV 1973, 243-245; SMIRNOVA 1981; MUSAKAEVA 1994.

<sup>32</sup> RTVELADZE, TASHKHODZHAEV 1973.

<sup>33</sup> MUSAKAEVA, 1991; 1994.

<sup>34</sup> IBID., 1994, 43, Table 1.

<sup>35</sup> MUSAKAEVA 2014, Table 40, 45, 46.

<sup>36</sup> RTVELADZE & TASHKHODZHAEV 1973, 243-245; SMIRNOVA 1981, 25.

<sup>37</sup> SMIRNOVA 1981, 353, no. 1477.

another case, with a Nestorian cross in the field of the coin, the interpretation of the inscription “prn / βγγ / κश्यšy” is difficult and not given.<sup>38</sup>

### **Khorezm**

On the coins of Khorezm, there are no face portraits of the rulers that appeared in the iconography of Transoxiana under the influence of Byzantium, but Nestorian symbols, in particular crosses, are introduced into the state silver coinage of the rulers of Khorezm as an additional symbol. So, in 1991, a treasure of silver Khorezmian coins was found in the Shavvat region. The original composition of the hoard consisted of 100 - 120 copies, 38 of them were received by the State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan from N.I. Zhumaniyazov.<sup>39</sup>

This ruler is mentioned in the list of Khorezmian kings by Biruni, and in Chinese sources as Shaoshifen.<sup>40</sup> It is believed that he ruled in the second quarter - early 60s of the 8th century in Khorezm. His name is Khorezmian and is translated as “having the glory (farn) of Siyavush”. Thirty-seven pieces of coins from this hoard represent the usual type of coins of this ruler: on the obverse there is a portrait of a king with mustache to the right, wearing a tiara crown with barb. Above the forehead is a crescent moon with three dots inside, there is an earpiece and a back piece. The ends of the diadem flutter behind the head. In front of the face there is an inscription in Khorezmian cursive script. All this is enclosed in a rim of pearls. Reverse: an image of a horseman (deified image of a king) wearing a tiara of the same type as on the obverse. Behind the head is the Khorezmian *tamga*. Around the circle there are signs of the Khorezmian legend: titles and name: "The ruler of King Shaushafan". Among the coins of the hoard, a new type was distinguished, which differs from the rest by the presence of a cross behind the tiara. The cross was additionally introduced into the stamp and placed behind the head of the ruler on the obverse and behind the back of the rider on the reverse. It is curious that on the obverse there is another sign that distinguishes coins with crosses from the total mass. On the obverse, just below the cross, there is a sign in the form of a loop, the fact that this element was deliberately introduced by the stamp carver, and the fact that it is the cult symbol and is the same size of these two crosses. On the reverse side, for obvious reasons, the horseman is depicted much smaller in size than the portrait, while the cross is the same size as on the front side. This indicates the importance of the element, in this case a cross in the shape of the depicted Christian.

The same symbols are found on the coins of another ancient Khorezmian ruler, Azkatsvar. Two types of all have crosses, just like on the Shaushafan coins, originally introduced as an additional element in the stamp. These coins were

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<sup>38</sup> SMIRNOVA 1981, 25.

<sup>39</sup> MUSAKAEVA 1997.

<sup>40</sup> 稍施芬. Cf. *Xin tangshu* vol. 221/2.

published by B.I. Weinberg. The name of the king was read by V.A. Livshits and interpreted as "Possessing the glory of Siyavush".<sup>41</sup> On the latest type of Azkatsvar coins, when the name of this ruler, written in Arabic characters, was entered into a new type stamp, the Nestorian crosses disappeared. It is known that in addition to its main value of money, a means of circulation, a coin, from its very inception, has always had a political propaganda value of power and ideology - religious beliefs. In this regard, the coins of ancient Khorezm are a unique numismatic source on the history of ancient pre-Muslim beliefs, the history of Christianity. Thus, during the reign of Shaushafan and Azkatsvar, up to the arrival of the conquest of Khorezm by the Arabs, Nestorian Christians were widespread there. Shaushafan and Azkatsvar could profess Christianity or patronize it along with local beliefs until the arrival of Islam. The appearance of the icon should be dated year 750 - 762, judging by the time of the reign of these Khorezmian kings.

### **Chach**

During the 2000s, a number of finds were made at the Kanka settlement and in the vicinity of Varakhsha, associated with Christianity in ancient Central Asia. Finds of objects from Byzantium are very rare for a museum. The last time when Byzantine coins entered the museum was 70 years ago. However, over three years (2010-2013), the collections of the State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan were replenished with unique exhibits. A copper coin of Arkady (395-408), the first Byzantine emperor, was found at the Kanka settlement and transferred to the museum. In 2012, the museum received the golden bracteate Anastasia (491-518), which was discovered during the excavation in one of the private farms of the Surkhandarya region.<sup>42</sup> (Pic. 20.1). Among the finds from the Kanka settlement there are two weights, one of them with a weight of 3 *nomisms* (Pic. 16). In addition, crosses were found at this settlement: one of the Nestorian types with a turquoise insert in the center, the second with an imitation of the insert, it was broken off, the third - stone (Pic. 15, 1, 2, 5). Unfortunately, the exact place of finds on the territory of the settlement was not indicated. By analogy with the crosses from Sughd (Pic. 15, 3,4), they can be dated to the 7th - 8th centuries.<sup>43</sup>

In 2019 the State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan (hereinafter referred to as the GMIUZ) received items from the settlement of Kanka. Most of these items are pottery with Christian symbols. The most remarkable archaeologically is the whole dish with the image of a high-necked jug which has an image on its body a Nestorian-type cross (Pic. 17).

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<sup>41</sup> WEINBERG 1977, 61; type G VI a, b.

<sup>42</sup> MUSAKAEVA 2012, no. 2, 90-92.

<sup>43</sup> RASPOPOVA 2014.

And finally, the unique, invaluable for science are the items received from the village of Mayskiy, Tashkent region in 2013 (Pic. 19; 20, 2). All these finds testify to the trade, cultural and historical ties of the ancient state formations of Central Asia with the Byzantine Empire in the 5th-6th centuries.

In early May 2013, in the village of Mayskiy, during excavation works to lay water trays, workers discovered gold objects. Subsequently, these finds were transferred to the GMIUz by the bodies of the National Security Service of the Republic of Uzbekistan, including various parts of a gold belt set, plaques applied to the bridle, gold stripes and plaques on clothes and fragments of other objects. The whole complex of objects discovered in Mayskiy suggests that, most likely, the workers discovered a unique burial place of a noble Byzantine warrior or nobleman. The fact that this was not an ordinary person is evidenced by the details of the golden Byzantine belt set. Golden belts belonged only to very wealthy people who occupied a certain place in the system of the state apparatus or a high military position. There are numerous examples of references to this in written sources. There is no doubt that typesetting belts in the early Middle Ages reflected the origin, official or military rank, and the merits of their owners. For violations, as Procopius of Caesarea testifies, they were deprived of "the belt and rank." The high position of the owner of the belt was reflected not only in the choice of the precious metal in this case - gold, but also in the shape of the belt details, in their design. The simplest belt was worn by all members of the society, and more expensive leather belts with bronze plaques had only a circle of people of a certain income. A special role in society was played by people who had belts with gold plaques and onlays.

Among the finds there is only one gold coin of Byzantium - a tremissis, presumably of the 6th century. The coin circle is slightly deformed with two edges. W. - 1.38 g (1.375 g); D. - 14.6x13.5 mm., The ratio of the axes - 6 hours (Fig. 20, 2). During this period, in Byzantium, a coin was minted from gold - it was a solid, in addition there were coins in denominations of half a solid - a semissis and a denomination that was one-third of a solid - tremissis. On the obverse side of the tremissis from Mayskiy, there is a bust image of a beardless emperor in a ceremonial tiara - a royal headdress, the upper part of the armor and a fragment of a shield with the image of a horseman are visible. The initial characters of the legend probably convey the name of the Byzantine emperor Justin I or Justinian I (preferably Justin I): "DN (I) YSTI ... XC / GIY ...". The reverse side of the coin features the image of Victoria. The image of Victoria, the goddess of Victory, is characteristic of early Byzantine coins of the 5th-6th centuries. Goddess Victoria on the Byzantine coins personified the victory of the emperor in the war. During the reign of Justinian I, and more likely at the end of his reign, the image of the goddess of Victory Victoria is replaced by an angel. Images of beardless emperors are traditional for early Byzantine numismatics up to the reign of Emperor Phocas (602-610). Since 602, the emperors of Byzantium

have been depicted with a beard. On a coin from Mayskiy, the emperor is depicted three-quarters to the right and without a beard. This gives us grounds to date the complex of objects to the 6th century. It is also known that in the 6th-7th centuries significant changes took place in the iconography of Byzantine coins, as a result of which the traditional image of Victoria on the reverse side of the gold solid was replaced by the image of an angel.

On the gold belt onlays from Mayskiy, there are images typical for the coins of Byzantium in the early period (Fig. 19). This is a plot traditional for Byzantine iconography - the image of an angel. Both the belt itself and the images of angels served as amulets for a warrior, not a simple owner of the belt. Such an angel, identical to the images of angels on early Byzantine coins, is found on the belt buckles from Mayskiy, which confirms the date given by the coin – 6th century. According to Christian tradition, the angel embodied the image of the leader of the heavenly army against the forces of evil - the image of the Archangel Michael. In addition, Michael in the Christian tradition acts as a mediator between God and people. He is the keeper of the magical words that created the heavens and the earth, he enters the names of the righteous in the book. Michael taught Adam agriculture, on Mount Sinai he gave the tablets of the Law to Moses.<sup>44</sup> The image of an angel on gold plaques from Mayskiy is almost identical to the image of this character on the reverse side of a rather rare type of gold coins from the period of the short joint reign of Justin I and Justinian I (April-August 527).

There is still a lot of work to do, both in the dating of objects and identifying their purpose. This is a long process associated with cleaning, restoration of materials, as well as the fact that the bulk of the items have been damaged by unprofessional removal. So, there are amazingly beautiful silver items with partially preserved gilding. These were barbarously removed from the ground details of the lining with the image of a fantastic bird resembling a peacock, as well as the lining with magnificent floral ornaments. The materials from the village of Mayskiy contain fragments of various items made of gold and twisted gold wire. Probably, the hryvnia was made from it - an important item of social significance. The hryvnia was decorated with precious stones. On the coins of Byzantium, rulers of Chach, Khorezm and Sughd were depicted with this indispensable attribute. Objects from Mayskiy undoubtedly contain products of Byzantine production, but there are also some details similar to finds from the Altai mounds dating back to the period of the 1st Turkic Khaganate. Period of the 5th-6th centuries is interesting in that this was the time of the search and restoration of contacts between Byzantium and the Sogdians, and later the Turks together with the Sogdians in the field of trade. This was the period of searching for new trade routes. Participation in the trade brought great profits. It is known that both the imperial house and representatives of the Byzantine nobility took part in trade, seeking to enrich their

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<sup>44</sup> *Myths of the Nations* 1982, 158-160.

treasury. Byzantium and Sogdians within the framework of the Turkic Khaganate, both skillful traders, were looking for ways and means of making trade deals. Sassanian Iran was a serious obstacle. Silk was the cause of strife. As is known, even in the Kushan period, the Great Silk Road passed through Central Asia. It connected the countries of Central Asia with Rome. The Roman Empire and Byzantium needed silk. Silk was presented as a gift even to emperors. By that time, the Sogdians were already making silk fabrics themselves and were interested in trade with Byzantium. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the finds from Mayskiy contain purely Byzantine items and separate plaques, similar to the material from the Altai burial mounds.

In 2016, a hollow Byzantine bead was found at the Kanka settlement (Pic. 14, 2). On the smooth surface of which a grain ornament was applied. Two thin wires are attached to the center over the smooth surface, over which a grain ornament is applied. Above and below the wires, there are two grained crosses, its lower part is laid out with grain in the form of a triangle. Between the crosses there are granulated (two gray and below the wires) triangles consisting of small triangles arranged in a checkerboard pattern: three below, two above them, above two one triangle stretched upwards. A wire was also found in the form of a circle with two rows of grain soldered on. This is a detail from the second smaller bead or a part of an earring from which the described bead and this round wire with grain – Byzantine bead with Christian symbols. Hollow beads with such fine grain are typical of the 10th century jewelry. A bead similar in manufacturing technique can be seen in the Byzantine hoard from Kiev, dated by the military treasures of Roman I, Constantine VII, Stephen and Constantine, found in a burial place.<sup>45</sup> The cross is very close in shape to its images on the coins of Phocas (602-610), Justinian I (527 - 565), Mavicius Tiberius (582 - 602).<sup>46</sup> However, the technique of making the bead does not allow dating it to the early time; most likely it can be dated from the 10th - 11th centuries. Although, connections with Byzantium for the Kanka settlement were noted at an earlier time.<sup>47</sup>

It is known that the Church of the East had a powerful economic organization and enjoyed the right to sell and acquire large land plots. Perhaps somewhere in the vicinity of Varakhsha, in Ustrushan, in Eastern Sughd, in Chach or in one of the quarters on the Kanka settlement, there were lands and houses that belonged to the Christian community. This is evidenced by data from numismatic sources - coins with crosses, as well as data from written sources.

After the Council of Ephesus, the Church of the East became the dominant church branch of Persian Christians. Some Christians made it to Sughd and Ustrushana. At the end of the 5th century the episcopal *cathedra* was established in

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<sup>45</sup> KROPOTKIN 1962, FIG. 19.1.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., Fig. 17, 1-3; 13-15.

<sup>47</sup> MUSAKAEVA 2010 & 2012.

Samarkand, which in the 8th century was transformed into the Nestorian metropolis. In 561, a peace treaty was concluded between Iran and Byzantium, in which, according to Menander, freedom of religion was established for the Persians living in Byzantium and for the Byzantines living in Persia.<sup>48</sup> The 6th century was the most favorable for Christians from the Church of the East, who preached their teachings in Sughd, Ustrushan and among the Turks. It is no coincidence that the emerging Christian symbols on coins are associated with the rule of the Turks in the 6th century. In the 6th century, tensions arose between the Western Turkic Khaganate and the Sassanian Iran, caused by disagreements between the parties over control of trade routes. The result of such actions was the search by the Sogdians, together with the Turks, of ways of negotiations with Byzantium. Byzantine coins testify to the intensity of the ties between Transoxiana and Byzantium. It should be noted that in the collection of the State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan of the Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Uzbekistan there are most coins of the 6th century, mainly minted by Justinian (527-565). Considering that the Byzantine collection of coins consisted mainly of local finds, we can talk about developed trade and economic, and of course, about cultural and historical relations.

The influence of Byzantine iconography is probably associated with the appearance on the Central Asian mints of the 6th-7th centuries images of the rulers on the front. It is curious that face images of rulers on coins are known for Eastern, Western Sughd, Chach, Ustrushana, but are absent in Khorezm and Southern Sughd. The iconography of Byzantium is characterized by face images of portraits of emperors. Researchers noted the Byzantine influence on the minting of Otrar, in particular on the transfer of the image of a lion. The image of the lion on the Otrar coins differs markedly from the images of the lions on the Chach coins and really conveys a different tradition. However, Chach, like Sughd, has coins with three-quarter portraits, and in Chach there are finds that testify to the spread of Christianity on its territory. This is a gold medallion of the type of Justinian's coins<sup>49</sup> – the famous Nestorian treasure found in Tashkent.<sup>50</sup>

In the 6th century, the flow of Christians increased in connection with the policy of Justinian, who sought to achieve the unity of the empire, and therefore preached the unity of the church. The phrase: "one state, one law, one church" belonged to him.

For the 7th-8<sup>th</sup> centuries numismatic finds are known not only in Sughd, Ustrushan, as it was in an earlier period, but also to the north of Sughd in Chach, Khorezm. Coins with Christian symbols found in Western Sughd indicate the existence of Christian beliefs there for a long time. These data are confirmed by

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<sup>48</sup> UDALTSOVA 1974, 266.

<sup>49</sup> MASSON 1972, 29 - 35.

<sup>50</sup> ANBOEV 1959, 39 - 40.

written sources. According to al-Samani, there was an ash-Sham (Syrian) mosque in Bukhara, built on the site of a Christian church, identified with the Banu Khanzala mosque. It was built on the site of a Christian church mentioned in the 10th century.<sup>51</sup>

Unique written sources of the period of Muslim domination were found in the Turfan oasis. The Sogdian-Christian texts kept in the Berlin Museum were written in the Syriac alphabet. They, as noted by V.A. Livshits, "noticeably differ from Buddhist and Manichean documents in terms of spelling and, obviously, are closer to the spoken language of the Sogdians of the 7th-10th centuries." According to V.A. Livshits, discovered in Ladakh (on the border of Kashmir and Tibet), a rock inscription in Sogdian script was inscribed by the Christian Noshfarn. This inscription dates back to 841 - 842, while the earliest inscriptions date from the last quarter of the 6th century.<sup>52</sup> According to written and archaeological sources, Sogdian colonies were known up to East Turkestan, through which, probably, preachers got to these regions far from their native places.

Christian merchants controlled the trade of Central Asia with China, not by chance, therefore, along the trade route from Byzantium through Sughd to China, objects related to the confession of Christianity are encountered, and Christian settlements are located all the way. The arrival of new masses of Christians took place along well-known trade routes, probably they went with trade caravans. The fact that Christian beliefs were present in Bukhara Sughd and took root there for some time is evidenced by the data of written sources. For example, Narshakhi notes the existence of a Christian church beyond Ryndan Street, on the site of which there was a mosque called Banu-Khanzala.<sup>53</sup>

Christianity in Central Asia prevailed for over ten centuries. In general, the ancient Christian beliefs in a certain way influenced the ideology of the Central Asian region, monuments of material culture, art objects, iconography of banknotes, as evidenced by the published materials. Research and registration of individual items of archeology, numismatics, written sources supplement information about the role and place of Christian beliefs in the ideology, political life of the Central Asian Mesopotamia and help to explore more deeply the issues of ancient beliefs, cults, rituals in the region, enriching our understanding of the ancient culture of the Middle Asia.

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<sup>51</sup> KAMALIDDINOV 1993, 62.

<sup>52</sup> LIVSHITS & KHROMOV 1981, 361 - 362.

<sup>53</sup> NARSHAKHI 1897, 70.



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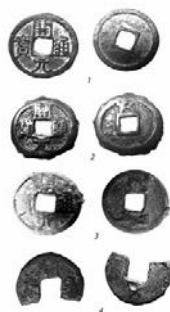
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### Picture. 1

The obverse and reverse side of the Kai Yuan Tong Bao coin with clear hieroglyphs. From the collection of ГМИУз (State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan, SMHуз ) Н-462/21.(Н-462/21).

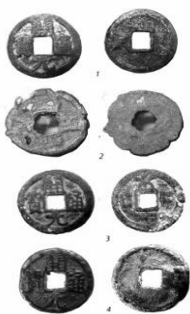
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The obverse and reverse side of the Kai Yuan Tong Bao coin with clear hieroglyphs. From the collection of ГМИУЗ (State Museum of the History of Uzbekistan, SMHUz) H-462/21.(H-462/21).

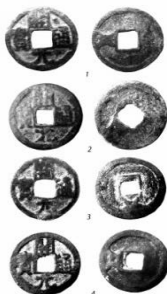
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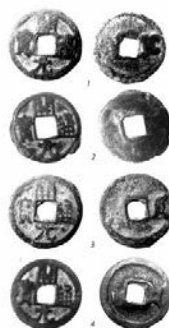
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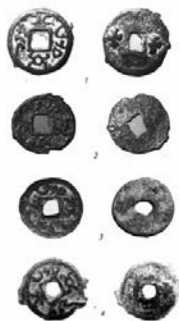
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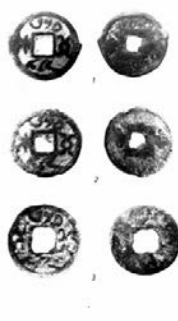
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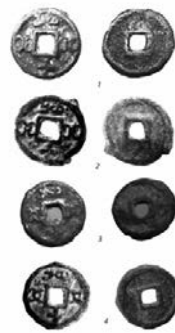
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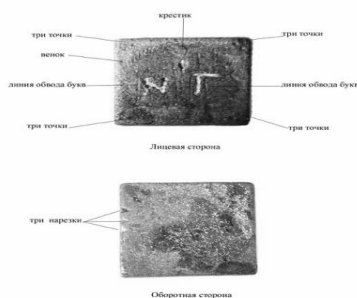


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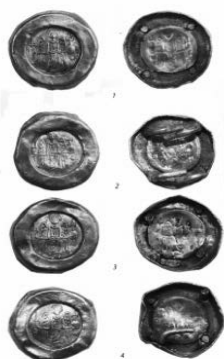
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## ICONOGRAPHY OF SYRIAC GRAVESTONES IN KYRGYZSTAN AND KAZAKHSTAN

Charles A. Stewart  
Benedictine College, USA

Over the past four years, an international team of archaeologists have identified the city of *Ilibalyk* that flourished between the eighth and fourteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Today the site is located near the Kazakhstan-Chinese border.<sup>2</sup> By 2018, excavations recovered 21 *kayraks* (gravestones), of which four have inscriptions in Syriac script and 17 bear an image of the cross. With the assistance of modern archaeological methods and technology, these new discoveries have prompted a complete reassessment of all previous Christian tombstones from the historical Zhetysu-Semirechye Region (which stretches between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, and parts of western China). There is over 700 known *kayraks* and new ones seem to be discovered every year—we call this collection the *Zhetysu-Semirechye Corpus*. Earlier scholarship has exclusively focused on their epigraphy; in contrast, this paper focuses on the iconography—that is, the artistic symbolism. For the sake of brevity, the Kazakhstan *kayraks* are the primary focus, since these are the most accessible to our researchers.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, by analyzing the localized cross iconography, we are able to provide insights applicable to Christians living throughout Asia.

Over one-hundred years have passed since the publication of Daniel Chwolson's pioneering work (1890) which demonstrably proved that a thriving Christian population resided in the cities of the Chuy Valley in modern Kyrgyzstan. Likewise, the short article 1903 article by Nicholai Pantusov provided similar

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<sup>1</sup> These excavations are directed by Dr Dmitry Voyakin of Archaeological Expertise, LLC (Almaty, Kazakhstan) and the Margulan Institute of Archaeology of the Republic of Kazakhstan and funded by a grant from the Society for the Exploration of Eurasia (Switzerland). International participation comes predominately from the Tandy Institute for Archaeology (Ft. Worth, Texas, USA) but has now shifted to the Lanier Center for Archaeology, Lipscomb University, (Nashville, Tennessee, USA) under the auspices for Dr Steven Ortiz and Dr Thomas Davis. The main field directors are Mr Denis Sorokin and Dr Steven Gilbert. Additional funding was provided by the Friends of Archaeology (FOA) Society in Houston, Texas.

<sup>2</sup> See Steven Gilbert's paper in this volume. The identification of the site as medieval "Ilibalyk" mentioned in medieval sources has been explained in previous publications: BAIPAKOV–PETROV 2015; VOYAKIN–GILBERT–STEWART 2020; STEWART–GILBERT 2021.

<sup>3</sup> This paper reflects the collective investigations of our research team (see note 1 above), while the interpretation is mostly mine. That is why I use both first-person singular and plural as I present the materials.

evidence for city of Almalyk, near the Ili River in western China. Both publications showcased how epigraphy and funerary monuments play a crucial role in our understanding medieval Asian history. Since then scholarly attention has focused on the linguistic information provided by the *kayraks*—and rightly so, because the archaeological context was not recorded well—even by standards of that time—and their specific provenance was lost.<sup>4</sup> Syriac-language experts, S.S. Sluskij, along with F.E. Korsh, were the first to recognize the valuable information that their etched cross symbols had, and they began to create a typology (systematic classification of the forms) for the Moscow Archaeological Society (**fig.1**). Sluskij realized, however, that there were many discrepancies between his translation and those of Chwolson, and that is where he placed his focus, abandoning his typological analysis of the crosses. Nevertheless, these were his brief thoughts on the iconography:

We conclude by saying a word about the use of the Nestorians' cross symbol. The typology here illustrates that Central Asians did not depict the crucifixion on their crosses, considering the memory of the Savior's shameful death suffered through humiliation. The cross of metal is such a common symbol of Christianity that even the Nestorians could not omit it: but they tried to make it a symbol as much as possible rather than a depiction that resembled [historical] facts that formed the basis of it [the symbol]. It is interesting how these symbols are reminiscent of our christening signs [we use today] along with the Singan-fu stone [*Xi'an Stele*] — so far these are the only material monuments by the Nestorians preserved in Central Asia.

And so, we do not see an attempt to depict the Crucifixion on these stones, although the technique can be considered capable of this. Likewise, by combining the cross with a base (which is another symbol), we are convinced that we do not see a reflection of the instrument of suffering. Finally, most of these crosses are not the image of the historical cross...: all the crosses of our Nestorian inscriptions are a type of decoration, which only conveys the passion of the cross in symbolic terms. It is only at a very late stage when many crosses were drawn so they resemble a historical cross. These drawings of the cross pattern, as applied in Central Asia, were, of course, brought by the Nestorians from the west...<sup>5</sup>

There are several problems with Sluskij's conclusions of the iconography, based on his nineteenth century understanding of "Nestorian" theology. His thesis emphasized that these crosses were not crucifixion scenes, thus not "historical"

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<sup>4</sup> For a good bibliography that lists all the scholars who have contributed to the translations of the *kayraks*, see KLEIN 2000 and FARINA 2013. For the lost knowledge regarding the archaeological context see KOLCHENKO 2018.

<sup>5</sup> SLUSKIJ 1889, 66-67.

narratives—as a result, they were *symbols* not *representations*. This interpretation was meant to distinguish between the “Nestorian heresy” from the Russian orthodoxy, which he belonged; however, based on our current understanding of Syriac Christianity, there is no reason to assume that the community that carved the *kayraks* believed or practiced Nestorianism, and that their use of the cross would reflect such doctrine. Today there is growing consensus among scholars that neither the Syriac liturgy nor its surviving artworks depart from other medieval Christian traditions.<sup>6</sup>

After the death of Sluskij—with the rise of Marxism in the Soviet Union and China—research investigating Christianity in Central Asia was not encouraged and few additional sites and artifacts were identified. As a result, some western historians assumed that Christianity was limited to small populations within this historic capital cities (Suyab, Balasagun, and Almalyk) and exclusive of rural nomadic populations.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, evidence for Christianity in between medieval Suyab (Ak-Beshim, Kyrgyzstan) and Almalyk was missing—that is, no similar archaeological monuments were known anywhere in modern Kazakhstan. This situation changed in 1997 with the discovery of five new churches, four at Ak-Beshim and one at Urgut (Uzbekistan) in 2004.<sup>8</sup> The reconsideration of the Zhetysu-Semirechye Corpus of *kayraks* and its associated material culture were also provided international attention by the publications of scholars such as Wassilios Klein, Mark Dickens, and the series *Orientalia-Patristica-Oecumenica*.

In the year 2014 Kazakhstan was added to the list of countries where Christian *kayraks* were found. A resident at Usharal village discovered an inscribed gravestone (the *Petros Kayrak*), which is the largest inscribed Christian monument thus far found in the region (**fig. 2**).<sup>9</sup> As such, this *kayrak* serves as a bridge between the two capitals and periods—Karakhanid Suyab (1000-1211) and Chagatai Almalyk (1211-1363) — thereby, signifying that Christianity was widely disseminated phenomenon throughout society. That is, Christianity was not only a cosmopolitan religion, but also was evident in smaller settlements and

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<sup>6</sup> BROCK 1996; HAMMOND 2004, lviii; ZALESSKAIA 1998:18-19.

<sup>7</sup> This view is represented by BARTHOLD 1901, 20-26, FRYE 1990, 164-169, and GOLDEN 1992.

<sup>8</sup> SEMYONOV 2002; SAVCHENKO 2005.

<sup>9</sup> For more information on the site, see Steven Gilbert’s paper in this volume; see also PETROV et al 2014; BAIPAKOV–PETROV 2015; VOYAKIN et al. 2020; and forthcoming, STEWART–GILBERT 2020 and DICKENS–GILBERT forthcoming 2022. The *Hovhannes Kayrak*, inscribed in both Syriac and Armenian with the date of 1323 seems to be larger than the *Petros Kayrak*, but its dimensions are unpublished; GINEY 2016. The *Hovhannes Kayrak* is most likely from a cemetery near the Armenian monastery of St. Matthew at Issyk Kul (Kyrgyzstan); the stone is now in the storage areas of the Hermitage Museum (St. Petersburg).

rural areas.<sup>10</sup> Between 2016 and 2017, twenty more *kayraks* were discovered in Usharal; all depict crosses, while three have inscriptions. Other smaller stones and bricks have been found in the cemetery that may have served as grave markers, but we cannot be certain since they lack inscriptions or crosses.

This paper provides our preliminary art-historical assessment of the Usharal gravestones. We refer to the site as Usharal-*Ilibalyk*—the first name is the modern village and the second is the medieval name. Our presentation has three parts. First, it will describe the general characteristics of *kayraks* as monuments. Second, it will describe their typology and symbolism. Finally, the iconography will be situated in a wider socio-cultural context.

### **Kayrak as Monuments**

The term *kayrak* merely means “stone” in Turkic languages. In academic literature, however, the word signifies a particular kind of stone used to mark graves in Central Asia. These were *monumental*—that is, they were meant to commemorate the past (in this case, deceased people) and, as such, they were intended to be seen by future generations (**fig.3**). Thus, the stones were selected for their hardness and durability. From our archaeological investigations, we theorize that most of these were selected because they have sizes and shapes that approximate the size of the human skull. As such, they were “head stones” placed above the burial directly above the skull of the deceased.

While tombstones were not unique to either Christianity or this region, the examples first discovered by Pantusov had a particular set of characteristics unique to the area of Zhetysu-Semirechye.<sup>11</sup> The *kayraks* recently discovered at Usharal-*Ilibalyk* (Kazakhstan) belong to the same tradition, but are being studied in tandem with recovery of the burials and scientifically recorded. The *Ilibalyk* examples share these basic characteristics with those discovered earlier, they are: (1) naturally polished smoothed; (2) igneous, including granite and gabbro; (3) mostly spherical or lozenge-shaped; (4) and none are larger than 40 cm, in any dimension, except for the *Petros Kayrak* (which measures 95 cm x 28 cm x 17 cm). Such stones are commonly found in stream and river valleys within the

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<sup>10</sup> We assume that these Christians belonged to the Church of the East; however, we cannot rule out Jacobite and Melkite presence, and that is why I simply refer to them as “Syriac Christians” throughout this paper. Note that the discoveries at Usharal-*Ilibalyk* has been complemented by the synchronous reassessment of the early archaeological reports of Kyrgyzstan by Dr. Valery KOLCHENKO, who has highlighted the rural nature of a few Christian cemeteries of the Chuy Valley; See KOLCHENKO 2018, 48-103.

<sup>11</sup> The earliest Christian inscriptions, as found in Rome, are funerary in nature and correspond to the earlier funerary traditions of classical (Greek and Roman) culture; KAUFMANN 1917; SNYDER 2011, 157-195. For the forms of the Zhetysu-Semirechye *kayraks*, see KOLCHENKO 2018, 48-103; NRU 2006, 209-242.

region, but they do not occur naturally in field where the cemetery is located; in other words, they were brought there by human agency. The script and ornamentation of the *kayraks* indicate they served only one purpose—as tomb markers.

### Cross Typology at Usharal-Ilibalyk

Among the Ilibalyk *kayraks*, the most refined example is the *Petros Kayrak* which has two crosses inscribed on it (**fig. 2**). We labeled it based on the translation of the principal figure's name (Petros) inscribed on it.<sup>12</sup> The stone itself can be classified as an irregular elongated rounded-prism (or, more colloquially, “potato-shaped”) block of granite. This *kayrak*'s characteristics (size, inscription, decoration, and form) indicate that it was meant to be conspicuous compared to the others—literally its *hierarchical scale* (*Bedeutungsperspektive*) is symbolic [i.e.  $\epsilon\pi\alpha\rho\chi\acute{\iota}\alpha$  (hierarchy) =  $\epsilon\pi\rho\acute{\omicron}\varsigma$  (priestly) +  $\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi\eta\varsigma$  (governance)]. In other words, this stone was larger than the others gravestones and this was analogical to how the pastoral role (as commemorated by the names of three generations of priests) was more pronounced within the local assembly.

There are two predominate theories regarding how the *Petros Kayrak* may have originally been displayed.<sup>13</sup> First, it could have been placed horizontally flat over a grave like the Christian funerary monuments of Mongolia.<sup>14</sup> If so, the stone can be interpreted as an abstracted form of the human body and, presumably, it was oriented to echo the cadaver buried underneath. As such, the image of the cross was above the skull and the inscription “speaks” from the “head”. Note that there is a second cross on the end (**fig.2c**); if this interpretation is correct, then this smaller cross may correspond to  $\chi$ -shape (i.e. Greek *chi*) chrism applied on foreheads during ceremonies, such as ordination and baptism (this practice is explained more below). Alternatively, the *Petros Kayrak* may have stood upright and, if so, it can be classified as a stela. Regardless, either prone or standing, this stone brings to mind the earlier tradition of Kurgan stelae (or *balbal* figures) that represent abstracted forms of human bodies.<sup>15</sup> I propose that the Ilibalyk artists deliberately orchestrated or subconsciously emulated the earlier kurgan figures—

<sup>12</sup> For Dr. Mark Dickens' translations of these inscriptions, please see Steven Gilbert's paper in this volume.

<sup>13</sup> My interpretation of stela (apart from our team) is influenced by western classical and medieval archaeological approaches represented by the publications of GROSSMAN 2001 and THOMAS 1994.

<sup>14</sup> HALBERTSMA 2008.

<sup>15</sup> CHARIKOV 1976, 153-165. For an analogical example, I have argued elsewhere how herms and terminus figures developed in ancient Greece and the Roman Empire continued to be used by Christians in Late Antiquity as boundary markers that symbolized both space and time; STEWART 2018, 169.

which no doubt he or she would have seen standing upright throughout the Zhetysu-Semirechye region. Thus, earlier cultural practices of stelae serving as boundary markers (space) and memorials (time) were converted for Christian purposes, essentially maintaining the same symbolism—the gravestones marked the sacred burials underneath, thus demarcating the graveyard.

Crosses etched thereon christens the *kayraks* as “testaments” to the deceased persons’ faith. This brings to mind the words of Jesus that “...the very stones would cry out” (Luke 19:40)—and so the *kayraks* “speak” for the buried. The inscribed crosses have a variety of shapes and sizes, but can be categorized according to well-established systems developed in western Europe—for example, those schemas relating to medieval heraldry (**fig. 4**).<sup>16</sup> Note well—I am *not* arguing that there is a direct connection between the heraldry (and its associated meanings) and the crosses at Usharal-*Ilibalyk*; rather, I am highlighting that the forms we find at Usharal-*Ilibalyk* are not unique to the Syriac Christians or Zhetysu-Semirechye region, but conform to global medieval aesthetic—as first suggested by Sluskij. The crosses adorning the *kayraks* can be classified as such (**fig. 5**):

- 8 Calvary Crosses (*croix péronnée*)
- 7 Flared Crosses (*croix pattée*)
- 2 Simple Crosses
- 1 Processional Cross (flared with a prong)
- 1 Forked Cross (*croix fourchée*)
- 1 Knobbed Cross (*croix pommée*)
- 1 Patriarchal Cross
- 1 unfinished cross

Each of these types provides a glimpse into the visual culture and possible influences that shaped the local community. For example, the quantity of Calvary Cross images coincides with the large amount of cross imagery found in Syriac illuminated manuscripts since Late Antiquity (235-750) to the present.<sup>17</sup> The Calvary Cross type (**fig. 4k**) emphasizes the base, which usually has three steps and references the Reliquary of the True Cross venerated in Jerusalem. Of all the types, this one is crucial for iconographical analysis, and will be further explained in the final section. In contrast, the Flowering Cross (*crux florida*) motif (**fig. 4e, f**), which is common in the artworks from Syria to China, especially on the *kayraks* of Kyrgyzstan, has not been found yet at Usharal-*Ilibalyk*.

The Usharal-*Ilibalyk* example of a flared cross with a prong (or tang) at the bottom is certainly an image of a processional cross (**fig. 5i**). Processional crosses

<sup>16</sup> PARKER 1894,140-180; BRAULT 1967; CRAYENCOUR 1974.

<sup>17</sup> LE ROY 1963.

were liturgical objects commonly used throughout history; they were carried by priests or their associates as they enter into and exit the bema (sanctuary). Considered essential elements of worship, processional crosses symbolize both time (movement) and space (crossing from the *profane* exterior to the *sacred* interior), as well as sacred history—so that the appearance of the cross during the liturgy represents the incarnation of Christ momentarily in world history.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, they also are associated with “triumphal crosses” (*crux victrix*) that derived from a military standard (*labarum*) first fashioned by the Emperor Constantine in the year 312. Liturgical processional crosses consisted of a wood or metal cross that was forged with a prong at the bottom, which would be inserted into a wooden pole; alternatively, they may have been fashioned with a socket at the bottom. The Usharal-*Ilibalyk* example depicted on a *kayrak* corresponds to other pronged (or socketed) examples found on *kayraks* elsewhere (fig. 1, nos. 105, 136). Note that sculptural reliefs of processional crosses are known at some Syriac churches, for example, at the Rabban Hormizd Monastery (Alqosh, Iraq).

The “Patriarchal” type at Usharal-*Ilibalyk* (fig. 5o) has parallels on other *kayraks* in the Zetyusu-Semirechye Corpus.<sup>19</sup> Like the Calvary cross, the patriarchal cross was originally associated with the reliquaries of the True Cross.<sup>20</sup> The most famous example is the 9th-century reliquary known as the *Limburg Staurotheke* which was made in the Byzantine Empire, most likely Constantinople; its extra arms indicated that it contained a relic—so that it was unlike ordinary crosses.<sup>21</sup> Later bishops added extra arms to the crosses on their heraldry or emblems to indicate their higher authority—this is commonly employed by bishops in both Greek and Russian Orthodox Churches today. That is why the “extra-armed cross” is called a Patriarchal Cross. In the west, it is associated with the Duchy of Lorraine and is often called the “Cross of Lorraine”; however, these dukes were not first to use it in their crests, but rather the Hungarian King Béla III. The Patriarchal Cross was prominently depicted on his Gothic tomb within St. Matthias Church, Budapest, which was originally destroyed by the Mongols in 1241, and later restored. The Hungarians, although they were aligned with the Roman pontiff, were highly influenced by their southern neighbors, the

<sup>18</sup> GIGNOUX 2001; COTSONIS 1994. For liturgical symbolism, see the 7th-century *Mystagogia* of Maximus the Confessor and the 8th-century *Historia mystica ecclesiae catholicae* by Germanus I, Patriarch of Constantinople.

<sup>19</sup> For example, see SLUSKIJ 1889, Table 4.

<sup>20</sup> The Church of the East celebrates the Feast of the Discovery of the Cross on 13 September. Several manuscripts illustrate this important holy day; for example, there is a 13th century Peshitta Gospel manuscript, written in Syriac, from northern Mesopotamia (now in State Library of Berlin 195 Bl). On folio 162, the upper picture shows the vision of Constantine in Rome, and the lower depicts Empress Helena’s search for the True Cross in Jerusalem; BAUMER 2016, 94.

<sup>21</sup> Now housed in the Cathedral Treasury of St. George (Limburger Dom), Limburg an der Lahn, Germany.



Byzantines who had reliquaries of the True Cross in this Patriarchal Cross form. Note that the hagiographical account of the True Cross' discovery by Constantine's mother, the Empress Helena, would have been known in Central Asia; for example, the account is preserved among the manuscripts at Turfan, which was on the same medieval highway as Usharal-*Ilibalyk*, though separated by about 850 km.<sup>22</sup>

The forked and knobbed crosses found at Usharal-*Ilibalyk* have no parallels elsewhere in the Zhetysu-Semirechye Corpus. These are uniquely western types that developed on heraldry and were introduced into western Asia during the Crusades and the Latin Empire between 1095 and 1261. The Latin church, through Franciscan missionaries, had established a cathedral at Almalyk (30 km east of Usharal-*Ilibalyk*) by the year 1300.<sup>23</sup> It is possible, but not certain, that these friars brought western objects decorated with these cross designs; if so, perhaps they commissioned these forms to decorate their vestments, architecture, and liturgical objects. The fact that the Syriac community were making similar forms may signify that ecumenical rapprochement was accomplished between the local Syriac Christians and the foreign Latins. Historians often highlight the tension and conflict between various denominations; however, there was also collaboration and cooperation between the western Latins and eastern Syriac Christians, as mentioned by the writings of Giovanni da Pian del Carpine and Guillaume Rubruck.<sup>24</sup>

Because international trade networks allowed merchants and missionaries access across Asia, we are forced to consider a global perspective. In western Asia, the secular Latin governments became more tolerant of other Christian traditions under their subjugation, because, idealistically, there was growing historical knowledge and, practically, they needed allies to survive.<sup>25</sup> In the aftermath of Jerusalem's capture by the Muslim Ayyubid armies in 1187, Latin governments strengthened their alliances with their eastern Christian neighbors and subjects, particularly with Melkites, Maronites, and Syriac Christians. For example, the intermarriage between the Crusader Lusignan dynasty and the Armenian Hethumid dynasty signified movement towards establishing a "Christendom" –

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<sup>22</sup> HUNTER 2012, 303; for the relationship between *Ilibalyk* and Turfan, see STEWART-GILBERT 2021.

<sup>23</sup> EUBEL 1898, I.108; YULE-CORDIER 1915, III.11-13.

<sup>24</sup> DAWSON 1980, 3-72; JACKSON-MORGAN 1990.

<sup>25</sup> Regarding education, I am referring to the increase in the learning of foreign languages and historical documentation during the so-called "12th-century Renaissance" (*Hochmittelalterliche „Renaissance“*). Regarding secular Latin and Syriac cooperation, see WELTECKE 2003, III:53-78; TEULE 2003, III:101-122.

that is, a pan-Christian state encompassing different liturgical traditions within the Kingdom of Cyprus.<sup>26</sup>

The largest city of Cyprus, Famagusta, should be considered the chief port-of-call on the Silk Road during late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. There are many monuments here that display cross typologies belonging to different liturgical traditions springing from the “Great Church” (*ecclesia magna*).<sup>27</sup> For example, on the side of the 14th-century Maronite Church of St. Anne, there is a forked cross, with the inscription in Greek “Jesus Christ, God’s Son”; note that this church is located in the so-called “Nestorian Quarter” of the medieval city (**fig.6**). Also in Famagusta, during the 14th century one of the largest cathedrals, dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul, was constructed belonging Church of the East.<sup>28</sup> The Latin kings of Cyprus, Hugh IV (1293-1359) and, his son Peter I (1328-1369), apparently contributed to this Cathedral for the Syriac community, since their heraldic crest is carved within. A Syrian merchant named Francis Lakha was the main beneficiary—his name also signifies ecumenicalism, since his forename honored St. Francis of Assisi, though he was a member of the Church of the East. In this context, it is not a surprise that Syriac-speaking Christians living in Cyprus were officially declared “Chaldeans” and no longer referred to as “Nestorian”, according to the Council of Florence in 1445. This wider global perspective allows us to see how the variety of cross types we find in Usharal-*Ilibalyk* and the Zhetysu-Semirechye Corpus were possible on the other end of the Silk Road.

## The Cross in Central Asia

The cross is a common design in many cultures around the world, formed by the intersection of one line over another in a perpendicular fashion. As a graphic design, its success is due to its ease of replication; however, that simplicity can also lead to the cross’ ambiguity in archaeological contexts. In other words, cruciform shapes can be made inadvertently by children doodling or accidentally by stone masons sharpening a chisel and, obviously in these situations, the mark

<sup>26</sup> The theory behind such a Christendom is represented by, but not exclusive to, Thomas Aquinas’ *De Regno*, which was address to the King of Cyprus. For the wider historical context of Latin government policies regarding non-Latin Christian communities, see NICOLAOU-KONNARI-SCHABEL 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Here I am using this term (Great Church), for the sake of convenience, to refer to the shared heritage of liturgical forms of Christianity—that is, Syriac, Latin, Greek, Armenian, Coptic, etc.—prior to the political divisions that arose after the Council of Ephesus (431). Though term is popular among recent historians, such as MATTEI (2008) and PERRIN (2013), it is somewhat misleading since it was first coined by the pagan critic of Christianity, Celsus, who was perhaps applying it (μεγάλης Ἐκκλησίας) sarcastically (Origen, *Contra Celsum* V.59). By contrast, the “Great Church” has traditionally been called “the Catholic Church” (Ἐκκλησίας πάσης / *Ecclesia universa*) as traced to Irenaeus (*Adversus Haereses* I.10).

<sup>28</sup> OLYMPIOS 2014, 108-119; BACCI 2014, 227-232.

has no meaning. That is why scholars should be cautious in attributing religious identity to crosses found in Central Asia apart from taking into account the entire archaeological setting and, naturally, the associated epigraphy.

In prehistoric tribal cultures, from the Mongols to the Vikings, crosses were common symbols, often placed within circles referencing the sun. Sometimes it was depicted as a four-spoke chariot-wheel, embodying the idea that the sun rolls across the sky.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, the swastika is a variation of this theme conveying solar movement. Simple crosses were also commonly used as *tamga* (nomadic seal or tribal brand) throughout Central Asia and have a variety of meanings, depending on the region.<sup>30</sup> Incidentally, the cruciform surrounded by the sun's rays is the current Emblem of Kazakhstan (*shanyrak*), signifying the roof-opening of a yurt—hence, continuing solar symbolism.<sup>31</sup> When Christianity was spread through the Roman Empire and beyond, the cruciform sun symbol continued to be used, but the new faith provided it with additional significance. To Christians there was no theological problem with the appropriation of the sun symbol, since Sun-Day (“the Lord’s Day”) came to distinguish the new faith from the Jewish Sabbath; moreover, there was a prophecy metaphorically describing the messiah as the sun (Malachi 4:2), leading to the orientation of churches towards the rising sun (*Constitutiones Apostolorum* II.7). The association between Christianity and the cruciform sun symbol was common prior to its legalization in 313, so that Christians were being accused of being “the cross worshippers” (*crucis...religiosos*) and “sun worshipers” (*solem Christianum deum*)—charges which Tertullian denied (*Apologeticum* xvi.6; *Ad Nationes* I.xiii.1). This understanding of solar symbolism and orientation is relevant to the *kayraks*, because the associated burials are oriented west to east, with many of the heads propped up to face the rising sun.<sup>32</sup>

As Christianity expanded into Central and Eastern Asia, the cross became exclusively Christian identity marker. It was later avoided by Muslims, Jews, and, presumably, Buddhists who eventually abandoned the four-arm Dharma-wheel by the 3rd century.<sup>33</sup> With that said, there are some exceptions where Buddhists and Manicheans used the cross to convey similar ideas to Christianity, influenced by Sogdian and later Syriac Christians.<sup>34</sup> For example, in Japan there is a Chinese painting that, at first glance, seems to be Buddha sitting upon a lotus blossom, dated to the 12th or 13th century (**fig. 7**); however the figure holds a specific form of Flowering Cross (**fig.8**) commonly found on Christian monuments [**fig. 9b, 11**

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<sup>29</sup> KAUL 2003.

<sup>30</sup> OLKHOVSKY 2001.

<sup>31</sup> NAYMARK 2001, 232-240.

<sup>32</sup> VOYAKIN-GILBERT-STEWART 2020; STEWART-GILBERT 2021; KOLCHENKO 2018.

<sup>33</sup> TALIA 2018; HEILO 2015, 55; PRICE 2013, 178; COOMARASWAMY 1998, 31-32.

<sup>34</sup> KLIMKEIT 1979; FRANCKE 1925.

(l, n, o, p)], so it has been interpreted as a Syriac Christian image of Jesus.<sup>35</sup> Because of its ambiguity, the lotus figure has been reinterpreted as a “Manichean Buddha Jesus”.<sup>36</sup> Without further data, however, we must consider both interpretations equally valid. Nevertheless, note that in this example the cross is also sitting on a blossom, similar to the figure—so there is a *direct* visual association between the figure and the cross, thus it is most likely an image of Christ. Moreover, the circle in the center of this cross (**fig.8**), as I explain in final section below, is a reference to the Reliquary of the True Cross in Jerusalem. Similar visual appropriation is found between Zoroastrianism and Syriac Christianity in Central Asia, where “stepped altars” were surmounted by crosses; such altars were common in Zoroastrian artworks while winged figures were common to Christianity (**fig. 9**). In other words, there is a direct correspondence between the form of the “stepped altars” in Zoroastrian art and the “stepped pedestals” of the Calvary Cross—which came first is still an open question.

### Cross Connotations

The Christian cross was (and is) a pictogram that has deep history and, thus, has accrued complex connotations as it spread to different regions, encountering various cultural systems. To understand the meaning of the cross in medieval *eastern* Asia, we must understand how the cross emerged in ancient *western* Asia. Among scholars a consensus has emerged that the cross was used by the Great Church prior to the legalization of Christianity in 313 AD and, thus, independent of imperial Roman ideology.<sup>37</sup> With that said, the cross was a shared symbol, expressing the earliest Christian traditions and, as such, during the Middle Ages, it was used as a symbol of solidarity during times of persecution among various Christian cultures. As elucidated by historian David Wilmhurst, by the late 13th century, the leaders of the Church of the East believed that: “...Latin, Armenian, Greek, Jacobite and Nestorian Christians must overcome their mutual jealousies and work together”.<sup>38</sup> These traditions sprang from the same root and, therefore, the cross represented a shared symbol, maintaining ideas that coalesced in the first century as expressed in the New Testament documents.

Over the centuries the simple form of the cross came to accumulate many connotations as Christian theology developed, thereby becoming a complex multivalent symbol. So, by the Middle Ages, the cross reflected several abstract ideas, while its physical presence could serve various functions, depending on the context, such as in musical notation (saltire), military (banners and castle loopholes), coinage, jewelry, etc. Obviously, this is not the place to list all the functions and meanings of the cross; however, concerning the Usharal-*Ilibalyk*

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<sup>35</sup> IZUMI 2006.

<sup>36</sup> GULÁCSI 2009.

<sup>37</sup> DANÉLOU 1964, 136-145; DINKLER 1967; HURTADO 2006.

<sup>38</sup> WILMHURST 2016, xi.

*kayraks*, it is necessary describe how our team of archaeologists are interpreting the symbolism as we try to understand this particular society. We propose that the cross' earliest denotations were maintained in the Syriac-speaking community over the centuries as their faith spread across Asia. As such, the cross referred to four main concepts: (1) the monogram of Christ's name (thus, Christ himself); (2) the implement of Christ's sacrificial death (crucifixion); (3) the sign of victory over death (Eternal Life, salvation) and; (4) divine auspices. These representations are clearly related to each other, but emphasize different aspects of Christian ideology.

First, the monogram of Christ's name (Christogram) was one of the earliest symbols that Christians used in their artworks. Though the human nature of Jesus Christ could be depicted as a male figure, his divine nature was impossible to confine to an image. This caused a problem for Christology, since his dual nature was essential to its doctrine and art; so as a convention, the monogram of Jesus' name came to represent the second person of the Trinity, also known as the "Word of God" (the *Logos*).<sup>39</sup> In other words, because both Judaism and Syriac Christianity were rooted in a scriptural (textual) tradition, written words behaved as visual symbols; so that the "Word of God" was manifested, quite literally, in the scriptural name of God. Because the New Testament was written in Greek, the rendition of Christ's name in Greek (Ἰησοῦς Χριστός) became standardized as a representation of the "Word of God" and could be reduced to the initials "I" and "X". Combing these Greek letters, so that the "X" is tilted, Christ's name can be signified by  $\text{I}\chi$ —this is known as the *chrisimus* and *chrismon*. Likewise, the word "Christ" (ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ) could be abbreviated using the first two letters "X" and "P" forming the *chi-rho* symbol  $\text{X}\rho$ , or alternatively,  $\text{P}\chi$ —both are considered *staurograms*.<sup>40</sup> This symbolism behind these Greek letters continued to be maintained by the Syriac Christian community prior to the Council of Ephesus (431), and are found in the writings of Ephrem the Syrian (306-373) and eventually it spread into Eastern Asia.<sup>41</sup> In time, the halo combined with the *chrismon*, became the accepted manner for artists to symbolize the divinity of Christ in pictures.<sup>42</sup> My first main point is this: when members of the medieval Syriac community saw the image of the cross on their *kayraks*, it brought to mind the name of Christ in the form of the Christogram. Both the name of Christ and

<sup>39</sup> SCHILLER 1971-1972, I.131.

<sup>40</sup> For early archaeological examples, see FINEGAN 1992, 339-389.

<sup>41</sup> DÖLGER 1972, 73-74; KLEIN-ROTT 2005, 415-16, fig. 11. For example, Syriac artworks often show the *chrismon* placed within Christ's halo as a form of monogram (or ligature) to identify him apart from other saints: British Museum, London (UK) (MSS Oriental 3372); Bibliotheca Augusta, Wolfenbüttel (Germany) (31.300, fol. 284 v.); *Commentary of Dionysius Bar Salibi*, Patriarchal Library, Homs (Iraq).

<sup>42</sup> The history of the halo in Buddhist and Christian art cannot be provided here, but there is an indirect correlation; MATHEWS 1999, 117-123.

his identity as the “Word of God” was associated with the manner of his sacrificial death, which requires further treatment.

The relationship between the cross, the *name* of Christ, and the historical *figure* of Christ is illustrated clearly in a surviving masterpiece of Syriac metalwork known as the *Grigorova Plate*, named after the village, where it was found in Perm Krai (Russia) (**fig.10**).<sup>43</sup> Based on the plate’s formal qualities and script, there is some consensus that it was forged in the Zhetysu-Semirechye region, sometime between the ninth and thirteenth century—thus, contemporary with the *kayraks* and essential for their iconographical analysis. According to its form, size, and imagery, the plate has been identified as a paten used in the liturgy for consecration of eucharistic bread. It depicts seven scenes. The three main scenes are formed by interlaced circles showing the Crucifixion (lower right), Resurrection (lower left), and Ascension of Christ (top); between these are three other scenes, Daniel in the Lion’s Den (bottom), Peter’s Denial (top right), and two kneeling priests holding ripidia (liturgical fans). The seventh scene in the central cross that sums up the entire composition. Note that the Crucifixion scene shows Christ’s cross surmounting a three-step hill, symbolizing Golgotha; Christ’s death is juxtaposed with his Resurrection scene, where the concept of the “Risen Christ” is symbolized by the Flared Cross (with a relic circle)—that is, the cross here represents the divine nature of Christ, which cannot be depicted, but only symbolized by the Divine Name in the form of the *chrismon*. The artist also provided a visual connection between the historical place where resurrection occurred (Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem) and the Reliquary of the True Cross which was later housed near the same location. In other words, the Tomb of Christ (in **fig.10**) has the same formal qualities with the medieval Reliquary’s shrine (**fig. 12a**), and their relationship is further emphasized by the flanking figures on each side (known as the archetypical three-figure composition or “heraldic device”). These connections coalesce with the paten’s function, so that the altar where the bread and wine were consecrated served as “the hill of Golgotha”, and the plate and chalice become the “cross” upon which Christ’s body was broken and blood poured. This relationship is even more pronounced in the Syriac tradition since the term for the Eucharistic meal is “Holy Sacrifice” (ܩܘܪܒܢܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ, *Qurbānā Qadišā*), and the bread is stamped with a cross, as well as sketched on the Thabilitho—which is also a considered a type of “cross”.<sup>44</sup>

Second, the cross symbol referred also to the wooden frame upon which Christ was crucified. The term used in the New Testament was *stauros* (σταυρός), based on the Latin term *crux* or “wooden stake”. The apostle Paul explained in 1 Corinthians (1:18) how the crucifixion was central to Christian doctrine and a

<sup>43</sup> CHWOLSON-POKROVSKY-SMIRNOV 1899; DARKEVICH-MARSHAK 1974; ZALESSKAIA 2013.

<sup>44</sup> ROYEL 2016.

symbol of salvation; in this passage he used the phrase “word of the cross” which then associated the conceptual Word of God and the literal term (*stauros*).<sup>45</sup> In another passage Paul wrote: “...may I never boast [to know anything] except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14). Here the apostle based his theology on the *historical* crucifixion of Christ, which was replicated by his own *spiritual* crucifixion—that is, every Christian becomes dead (i.e. “crucified”) to the world but alive spiritually. Paul repeated this concept in 1 Corinthians 2:2. Moreover, the concept of sacred history and the centrality of the cross is continually found in Syriac literature, such as the *Cave of Treasures* and Bar Hebraeus’ *Chronicon*. Through this literature, the historical crucifixion (physically in time) transcended into metaphysical and timeless symbols associated with specific doctrines. For example, God’s intangible love for humanity becomes a tangible symbol through the cross, which was preserved in the teachings of the Syriac ecclesiastical community; for example, in the introduction of the *Revelation of the Apostle Paul*, it referenced the “mystery of the cross”.<sup>46</sup> My second main point is this: when members of the medieval Syriac community saw the cross, they would be reminded of Christ’s sacrificial death, and that, in turn, symbolized divine love (ܠܘܒܐ *hūbā*). The crosses on the *kayraks*, thus, connected the dead body in the grave with the death of Christ; as love binds Christians with their God, so the beloved dead speaks to the living through their inscribed stones.

Third, the cross functioned as a sign of victory over death. The doctrine behind this was developed, once again, by the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 15 where he appealed to prophecies of Isaiah (25:8) and Hosea (13:14), leading to this paradoxical proverb: “Death is swallowed up in victory (νῖκος).” In terms of form and ideology, there was an association between the Christian cross and the Greek and Roman *tropaeum* (i.e. *tropaeum crucis*). Trophies were cruciform wooden beams set up by soldiers after a battle to commemorate their triumph and as an act of worship to thank the pagan gods for victory.<sup>47</sup> Ironically, in this Roman context, the *honorable* trophy resembled the *humiliating* cross. This irony was maintained in Syriac literature; for example Ephraim the Syrian wrote in the context of funerals: “The Archangel Gabriel / Expands the banner of the Your Cross / To the glory and exultation / Of the of the children of the faithful Church”.<sup>48</sup> In the Early Christian and medieval periods, the Greek word νίκη, Latin *victoria* and *triumphans*, and Syriac ܒܙܟܘܬܐ / *bzkwṭ* (“in triumph or with

<sup>45</sup> This understanding is preserved in Ishodad’s (c. 850, patriarch of Merv) *Commentary on Corinthians*; GIBSON 1916, 24.

<sup>46</sup> PERKINS 1866, 186.

<sup>47</sup> Justin Martyr, I *Apology* 55; Eusebius, *Oratio de laudibus Constantini* 11.2; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* XVIII.32); DINKLER 1962, 1964. At some point in hagiography, the three magi (“kings”) from the east give their crowns (or wreaths) to the Christ-child, convey Christ’s victory over Zoroastrianism; SCHILLER 1971-1972, I.100.

<sup>48</sup> BURGESS 1853, 26.

victory”) became common inscriptions carved on or near the crosses and placed on banners decorated by crosses; thus, the once-instrument of death became a universal symbol for eternal life. Often on Late Antique sarcophagi and churches the cross is adorned with a wreath—a classical symbol for victory or accomplishment.<sup>49</sup> My third main point is this: the crosses on the *kayraks* testified in the belief that as Christ was victorious over death, so the buried dead of Zhetysu-Semirechye hoped in their physical resurrection at the eschaton. Victory could also be hoped, however, for other earthly matters.

When Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity, his vision of the cross and his subsequent victory in battle, led to another connotation—victory over paganism and non-Christians. During Constantine’s reign, the cross formed the basis of a new military standard called the *labarum* which would replace the pagan *aquila* (Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* I.28-31; III.2, 26, 33). As the entire Roman Empire converted to Christianity, emperors played the role as defenders of Christendom; that is, their battles against pagans and non-Romans were not merely political, but considered spiritual warfare. Thus, the *chrismon* and *staurogram* became common symbols used on banners and shields within the Byzantine east and the Latin west, both in religious art and in later heraldry.<sup>50</sup> When the armies of Islam invaded Byzantine territories (and later the Iberian Peninsula), Christians soldiers used the cross as their emblem as they fought to reclaim their land; that is why the Crusades were quickly associated with the symbol from which their name derived (*crucesignatus*). Processional crosses used in liturgies across denominations, including the Church of the East, were derived from the *labarum* as a symbol of victory and salvation; thus, the Syriac concept of the “triumphal cross” sprang from the same tradition as Latin and Greek sources.<sup>51</sup>

While Syriac-speakers would have been familiar with these Late Roman and Byzantine military standards, they would have also seen Sasanian Persian banners known as the *Derafsh Kaviani*. This consisted of a wooden pole surmounted by a flag bearing a four-pointed star and in-between the rays formed a flared cross.<sup>52</sup> Because its use pre-dated the *labarum*, the Persian *Derafsh* may

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<sup>49</sup> ESBROECK 2005; SCHILLER 1971-1972, I.100.

<sup>50</sup> DINKLER 1962, 1965, 1967.

<sup>51</sup> DAUVILLIER 1956; ESBROECK 2005.

<sup>52</sup> SARRE 1903; SARRE 1941-1944; KHALEGHI-MOTLAGH 2011. The origins of the *Derafsh Kaviani* can be traced further back to the Kingdom of Urartu as displayed on a 9th century BCE Urartian bronze disk from Altuntepe (Turkey); SHAHBAZI 2011. In the Urartian context this symbol served as a religious emblem and was not militaristic; JAKUBIAK 2004. Note that the western Asian provenance is important here because the ancient Urartu region eventually became the homeland of the Armenian and Syriac Christians, particularly those residing at Edessa and Nisibis—cities that become the key early centers of Syriac learning and literature. For more on the relationship between the four-pointed star and cross known as the “almond rosette” (*mandelrosette*) and the Christian jewelry at Usharal-*Ilibalyk*, see STEWART 2021.



have actually influenced Constantine when he fought campaigns against the Persians while serving under the Emperor Diocletian at Nicomedia—but that complex theory cannot be fully explored here. My point is that the Syriac community would have employed the cross as a *flag* or *banner*, serving a variety of purposes: as an identifying marker, signaling device, and symbol of warfare. Note these uses were supported by scriptural passages where banners were used to symbolize a variety of concepts: love (Song of Solomon 2:4, 6:4); God’s presence (Exodus 17:15-16); identity (Numbers 2:2); military victory (Psalm 60:4); salvation (Psalm 20:15); and the messiah’s advent (Isaiah 11:10). These ideas were transmitted over the centuries and across Asia. For example, in the year 1287 Khan Nayan, prince of Mongolia (nephew of Genghis Khan) had converted to Christianity and decorated his banner with a Christian cross.<sup>53</sup>

The cross as a sign of victory, is inextricably connected to the fourth connotation—its use as a seal of individual blessing and divine auspices. Only kings, prophets, and priests of ancient Israel were anointed with oil; this was placed on the foreheads, in the form of the Paleo-Hebrew (similar to the Aramaic and Syriac) letter *taw* (x), which resembled, and therefore, became associated with the Greek letter *chi* (x).<sup>54</sup> For Christians, this was (and is) an important link to “Christ”, since (as mentioned above) the *chi* is the first letter of this word. The Greek term is a translation of the Hebrew *messiah* and Syriac (ܡܫܝܚܐ) which means “One Anointed (with oil)”. Christ was prophesied to be a future leader, embodying the threefold office (king, prophet, and high priest), thus his identity was sealed by the oily symbol. In a similar fashion, in the book of Ezekiel (9:4-6), an angel placed the *taw* (x) on the forehead of people marked for salvation; thus, it was an identity marker, serving as a symbol against death—this echoed the blood of the Paschal Lamb marking doors that caused the “passing over” of the Angel of Death (Exodus 12), as reinforced in Syriac liturgical terminology.<sup>55</sup> Likewise, in the book of Revelations, Christians were described as given “the seal of God upon their foreheads” (7:3) in the form of God’s name (14:1; 22:4)—this was interpreted as the x of the *chrism*. By the third century, Christians anointed the newly baptized, the ordained, and the sick with oil, in the form of the cross

<sup>53</sup> YULE–CORDIER 1993, I.339; TOEPEL 2009, 282; SCHILLER 1971-1972, I.115.

<sup>54</sup> The ritual of anointing Jewish kings and priests, and the symbolism, is described in the fifth-century Babylonian Talmud: “The Sages taught: How does one anoint the kings? One smears the oil in a manner that is similar to the form of a crown around his head. And how does one anoint the priests? In the shape of a *chi*. One smears the oil in a shape like the Greek letter *chi*. The Gemara asks: ‘What is the meaning of: Like the Greek letter *chi*? Rav Menashya bar Gadda said: Like the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew letter *kaf*’ ” (*Horayot* III.12a, translation by STEINSALTZ 2013). The book of Job (31:35) also refers to Job’s signature as a similar mark. Incidentally, the Paleo-Hebrew and Aramaic-Syriac *taw* is similar to the Phoenician version, from which the Greek and Latin *tau* (T) were derived; by the fourth century, as Hebrew script changed the letter *taw* no longer resembled the original ancient symbol, so the Greek letter was referenced as well as the Hebrew *kaf*.

<sup>55</sup> TABORY 1996.

(*signum crucis*) on the forehead, thus the word *christening* was both anointing (χρῖσμα) and the application of the *chrismon* (*Constitutiones Apostolorum* III.15.2; 16). This custom continues to the present day among the churches that sprang from the Great Church, including Syriac community.<sup>56</sup> In the Syriac *Acts of St. Thomas* the oil of anointing was connected to the cross, coalescing all the connotations (mentioned above) together: “Holy oil for anointing has been given to us and the Hidden Mystery of the Cross which has appeared in it”.<sup>57</sup> A dramatically altered form of this practice appeared in Central Asia; around the year 588, according to Theophanes:

The Turks had on their foreheads the symbol of the cross tattooed in black, and when asked by the [Byzantine] emperor how they came to have that sign, they said that many years earlier there had been a plague in the “Turkestan” and some Christians among them had suggested doing this and from that time forward their country had been safe [from plague] (*Chronographia*, AM 6081).<sup>58</sup>

The cross in this account served three purposes, as an: identity marker (Turk); apotropaic emblem (against the plague); and auspicious sign (safety).<sup>59</sup> This is why the crosses on *kayraks* are symbolic of the “head” of the deceased; the individuals buried would have received the oil of anointing during their baptism (and if applicable, during ordination) in the form of a cross on their foreheads. As such the *kayraks* are literally identity markers and abstracted “portraits” of the deceased.

Besides these four iconographic interpretations, it is important to remember that the crucifixion was remembered as a historical event rather than a mythical story. Apologists, like Justin Martyr (c. 100–165) and, his Syrian disciple, Tatian of Adiabene (c. 120–180) emphasized history and geography to distinguish Christianity from other religions. As a physical and geographical reality, Christian pilgrims would travel and experience the place where biblical events took place in Jerusalem; moreover, the crucifixion was re-enacted every time the bread was broken and wine was poured during the Holy Qurbana, symbolizing the broken body and spilt blood of Christ—so that every church altar became a “New Golgotha” or “New Jerusalem”. This ritualistic practice emphasized the centrality of the cross as re-presented on the church altar, and is one trait shared by liturgical traditions stemming from the ancient Great Church. As Syriac Christianity spread eastward, they brought these practices with them. Note that according to 13th-century Chinese sources, grapes were cultivated in the Ili Valley—which were not native to the region—presumably, these grapes were

<sup>56</sup> BROCK 2008; ROYEL 2016.

<sup>57</sup> JAMES 1924, 418; for the contemporary Syriac practice based on tradition, see ROYEL 2016.

<sup>58</sup> Translation after MANGO-SCOTT 1997, 398.

<sup>59</sup> GILMAN-KLIMKEIT 1999, 216-218.

used for making wine for the Christian liturgy.<sup>60</sup> Archaeologists have also identified a winepress attached to the church in Suyab (Kyrgyzstan) where many of the *kayraks* were first discovered.<sup>61</sup>

### Analysis of Typology

The core messages behind the ancient cross, mentioned in the previous section, had developed by the fifth century, and were maintained in the Syriac Christianity ever since. Depending on the epigraphy, form, and associated symbols, the cross' depiction could emphasize one particular meaning, while still conveying all the others. In terms of the cross' form (typology), there were many different designs and styles employed throughout Asia. Clearly there is no such thing as a "Nestorian Cross" or "Persian Cross" as sometimes described in previous scholarly literature, since all the crosses used by the Syriac-speaking churches can be found also in the other liturgical traditions stemming from the Great Church period. Nevertheless, because the carved crosses at Usharal-*Ilibalyk* can be studied in terms of their typology, it is necessary to discuss examples found in other Asian contexts.

For the sake of brevity, we confined our comparative analysis to those from Semirechye-Zhetysu and China. By far the most common type of cross in these areas is the flared cross (*croix pattée*), which has arms that widen outwards from the center; these may terminate in a variety of ways: flat, convex, concave, triangular, or adorned with fleur-de-lis (**fig.11**). These forms correspond to western cross typologies. A flared-cross with arms terminating with a convex line is commonly known as the "Bolnisi cross"; when arms end in two points forming an inward concave-like triangle it is known as a "Maltese cross" (*croix de Saint-Jean*). Those crosses with triangle-ends that are "convex" or drawn in an outward fashion are known as the "Occitan cross" (*croix occitane*); three of the earliest photographs of the *kayraks* from Suyab (Ak-Beshim, Kyrgyzstan) belong to this type, as published by Chwolson in 1890. A cross with arms ending with the fleur-de-lis is called the "patonce cross" (*croix patonce*) which is a variation of the Flowering Cross (*croix fleury*). These categories serve as a useful way to describe these cross' forms without listing all their traits.

Unfortunately, cross typology rendered in western European languages refer to late medieval conventions rather than their origins, and so they are not useful for understanding iconography, especially when found in Central and Eastern Asian contexts. For example, the "Bolnisi Cross" is named after an example from a 5th-century church in Georgia, but there are earlier forms found in mosaics around the eastern Mediterranean, including one of the earliest churches ever excavated dating to the mid-third century, Kefar 'Othnay (Tell Megiddo, Israel).<sup>62</sup> In

<sup>60</sup> BRETSCHNEIDER 1888, I.17.

<sup>61</sup> SEMYONOV 2002.

<sup>62</sup> STEWART 2019, 130-132.

Central Asia, the Bolnisi Cross can also be associated with the four-ray star and four-petal almond-rosette, as mentioned above regarding the Persian *Derafsh Kaviani*.<sup>63</sup> Likewise, the “Maltese Cross” predates the Order of St. John Hospitallers, from which the designation is derived; its earliest examples developed from eight-pointed starburst commonly found in Roman and Byzantine mosaics throughout the Mediterranean. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that the cross typology found in Central and Eastern Asia are based on western European models, or vice-versa; instead, the widespread occurrence of these forms suggests a common geographical region where they were developed and henceforth distributed—this general location can be considered either “western Asia” or the “eastern Mediterranean”, depending on one’s perspective.

Christianity was founded in the Roman province of Judea and that is where we can pinpoint the origin of the cross’ theology and typology. In the 2nd century, the Emperor Hadrian merged Judea with Syria forming the new province of “Syria Palaestina”, where Syriac-speakers played a major role in the formulation of Christian doctrine and practices. As outlined by C. A. Karim, the theology of the cross was further developed by the Syriac leaders whose ideas were circulated throughout the Great Church period.<sup>64</sup> We can assume this was the case for artistic forms and ecclesiastical organization; for example, the Latin word *abbat* (from which the English *abbot* is derived) can be traced to the Syriac term *abbā* (ܐܒܐ), denoting the director of a monastery. The Holy Land would be the hub where early Christian monks, missionaries, merchants, and soldiers spread their faith outwards. Likewise, pilgrims, belonging to different cultures from all over the world, would converge together when visiting the Holy Land; they, upon returning, would transmit ideas and artforms they had experience there to their homelands. That is why cross forms—like the Occitan type—has had such a wide geographic spread, from the west border of China to the west coast of France.<sup>65</sup>

There are some features, both iconographically and stylistically, that were developed in Central and East Asia that are not common in Europe. The most conspicuous distinguishing features are the associated inscriptions in Asian script, surrounding figures, and pedestals.<sup>66</sup> Pedestals are rendered in multiple formats; they are either simple (terminating on a square, finial, or tang) or more ornate (stepped, enflamed, winged, flowering, nebulous, etc.). In some Chinese examples (**figs. 11 i-p**), pedestals have ornate bases as if their crosses are sprouting from a flower blossom. Clearly these Asian examples are related to the Flowering Cross as well, which were further abstracted to the Occitan and Patonce forms (*compare figs. 4 e-f with figs. 11 i, j*). The earliest examples are found on monumental Armenian stelae called *khachkars* and in Syriac churches

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<sup>63</sup> STEWART 2021.

<sup>64</sup> KARIM 2004.

<sup>65</sup> LA FARGE 2000.

<sup>66</sup> PARRY 2006.

in modern Iraq, but are also known in Byzantine contexts in Anatolia and Cyprus.<sup>67</sup> In all these Asian types, the cross is sprouting like a living tree and, thus, connected to the Tree of Life (*Arbor Vitae*) described in the book of Genesis.<sup>68</sup> The concept is also derived from the book of Revelations where it is promised “To him who conquers I will grant to eat of the Tree of Life, which is in the paradise of God”; here, the “eating” can be interpreted as referring to the Holy Qurbānā, whereas the tree is a symbol of paradise or heaven (2:7; 22). This idea was first developed by Latin apologist, Justin Martyr, who wrote that Christ’s “crucifixion was symbolized by the Tree of Life planted in paradise...” (*Dialogue with Trypho* 86). Continuing this tradition, Ephrem the Syrian (306-373 AD) wrote: “That Tree of Life which was in the midst of Paradise prefigured the Redeeming Cross, which is the veritable Tree of Life, and this it was that was fixed in the middle of the earth (*Spelunca Thesaurorum*, Fol. 6b, col. 1)”.<sup>69</sup>

When Ephrem mentioned the “middle of the earth” he was referring to Mesopotamia (“middle of the rivers”)—that is, the Middle East, including Central Asia, where it was believed the Garden of Eden was once located. Ephrem further emphasized this poetical and mystical relationship of the “life-giving cross” in his *Hymns on Paradise* (XV.2; XII.10) and *Hymns on Virginity* (XVI.10).<sup>70</sup>

In art, the motif of the flowering “life-giving” cross is common to both the east and the west. Here I will briefly describe two examples, one Greek Byzantine and another Latin Medieval. The mid-10th century masterpiece known as the *Harbaville Triptych* illustrates how complex the message behind the simple cross can be; in this example, the cross’ arms lead to five flower blossoms, referencing the five wounds of Christ (hands, feet, and heart) during crucifixion.<sup>71</sup> As such, the cross is an abstracted representation of the divine Christ himself, as identified by his monogram IC XC (ΙΗCOYC ΧΡΙCΤOC) and his triumph (NIKA) over death; the two cypress trees bow down to him, representing the “princes of the apostles” (Peter and Paul, i.e. this is the common *Traditio Legis* motif), while the 24 stars convey the 24 elders around the throne of God in paradise (Revelation 4:1-4). Another striking example, that continues this ancient message, is the late-12th-century apse mosaic at San Clemente in Rome. Here the cross is the Tree of Life sprouting from a green bouquet that represents the Garden of Paradise, planted quite literally in Mesopotamia represented below by the four rivers Pishon, Gihon, the Tigris, and the Euphrates from which two stags drink (Psalm 42:1). Note the *staurogram* above the cross—this is to emphasize the fully-divine Word of God while representing the fully-human body of Christ on the cross. Altogether there are 50 spiraling tendrils that sprout from the cross that represent

<sup>67</sup> JENI 1995; AL-KA’BI 2014; for western types, see SCHILLER 1971-1972, I.100; II.90,

<sup>68</sup> SCHILLER 1971-1972, II.133 n.

<sup>69</sup> Translation BUDGE 1927.

<sup>70</sup> BROCK 1990.

<sup>71</sup> Musée du Louvre, Paris, Inv. No. OA 3247

49 years of enslavement to sin and 50th year of liberation (i.e. Day of Atonement, based on Leviticus 25:10-11).

In the previous paragraph, my purpose in discussing these two Mediterranean examples, was to explain the shared iconographical tradition of the Greek and Latin churches of Europe and the Syriac churches of Asia. That is, there was one theological message, but several different styles and designs were employed to convey it. Indeed, the use of the lotus-flower in Syriac contexts in Central and northern Asia are idiosyncratic, since that flower is native to southeast and subtropical Asia (**figs. 7, 8, 9 b, 11 l, n-p**). The stylized lotus was first developed in Hindu and Buddhist art where it denoted the idea of the spiritual realm (blossom, above) separated from the physical world (water, below).<sup>72</sup> With that said, there are close formal similarities between the four-petal lotus blossom of the east and the four-petal almond-rosette in western classical art, which has specific symbolism in Egyptian, Greek, and Roman mythology (e.g. “Lotus-eaters”, *Odyssey IX*) as well as Christianity (i.e. dogwood, St. John’s wort).<sup>73</sup>

### Calvary Cross as Historical Sign

Clearly the Asian Flowering Cross’ form and meaning are related to Calvary type. In terms of form, both have crosses above a base—the former includes a lotus or plant tendrils, while the latter has a stepped pedestal. Because the Calvary type is the most common form, so far, found at Usharal-*Ilibalyk*, it deserves a few more words, regarding its meaning. As mentioned above, the Calvary type is associated with the Reliquary of the True Cross which was kept in Jerusalem. Its name is based on the hill of Golgotha, which is an Aramaic (and Syriac) term for *skull* (ܩܠܘܬܐ) from which the Latin toponym *Calvariae* was derived. In the 380s the pilgrim Egeria recorded how the relics of the True Cross were venerated within the chapel built above the hill where Christ was crucified; she also mentioned how pilgrims would try to steal pieces of it (*Itinerario Egeriae*). To prevent this, remnants of those relics were encased in a cross-shaped Reliquary, elevated on steps, and secured behind a shrine; this shrine and the Reliquary was illustrated on a Byzantine chalice from the 6th century (**fig.12.a**) and the *Grigorova Plate* (**fig.10**). In the year 614 the Persians had occupied Jerusalem and took the Reliquary to their capital at Ctesiphon—an event that, certainly, had great significance for the Church of the East and all Syriac-speaking Christians; however, in 629, the Emperor Heraclius recaptured the Holy Land and negotiated the return of the Reliquary to the Holy Sepulcher. Coins of Heraclius commemorated this victory over the Persians and recovery of the Reliquary—strengthening the association between triumph and the Calvary Cross (**fig. 12.b**). The Reliquary remained in Jerusalem until Saladin invaded the city in 1187. One

<sup>72</sup> COOMARASWAMY 1998, 17-36.

<sup>73</sup> KING 1918, 104; STEWART 2021.

historical account stated that Saladin sent it to Baghdad.<sup>74</sup> If so, it may have been placed in the keeping of the Syriac community, just as it did over 500 years earlier; that may explain why the image of the Reliquary of the True Cross became the chief visual expression above all other symbols among Christians of Persia and Central Asia. Nevertheless, while the fate of the Reliquary after the Crusades is unknown, it is certain that the Syriac community had historically venerated the relic—at Jerusalem and Ctesiphon—well before its disappearance.

Early depictions of the Reliquary of the True Cross emphasize the stepped base, which symbolizes Golgotha. As such, the steps are defining elements separating this specific form from all other cross types. Historical accounts provide little details regarding the form of the Reliquary itself; fortunately, around the year 568, the Emperor Justin II made a facsimile of the Reliquary which he sent to Pope John III—today this replica is known as the *Vatican Cross* (**fig.13**). This replica should be considered a Constantinopolitan “clone” of the original at Jerusalem since it contained part of the True Cross—thus, it was equal in value to the original. The *Vatican Cross* was modified over the centuries, but recent scientific investigation indicates that its overall form has remained unaltered, providing a sense of how the original Calvary Cross appeared in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.<sup>75</sup> This reliquary’s cross was designed with a tang at the bottom to be inserted into a base (as it is now) and, perhaps, earlier to be inserted into a pole (for use as a processional cross). Unfortunately, the original base has been lost and is not recorded; most likely its form corresponded to the current the base (made in the 19th century) and conformed to the simple three-step design, from which the Calvary type derived. Notice how the cross itself is flared, belonging to the *pattée* type, common in the Syriac cross throughout the Middle East and East Asia. Another important characteristic of the *Vatican Cross* the circle in the center where the arms meet, surrounded by 12 pearls; this is actually where the relics of the True Cross are encased (*capsella*)—visible to pilgrims. The Syriac depiction of crosses in Central Asia and the Far East also have this same feature—a circle where the arms of the cross meet [**figs.1, 3, 5 (f,g), 8, 10, 11 (c,f,i,l,o,p)**]**—**thus, these reference the Reliquary of the True Cross in Jerusalem. Likewise, note that the reverse of the *Vatican Cross* consists of vegetal decoration that is best described as the Tree of Life or Flowering Cross motif. There should be little doubt that the Syriac depictions of the Flowering Cross are referencing the actual Reliquary of the True Cross. Even when Christians were borrowing Eastern artistic motifs, like the lotus or the Zoroastrian fire altar (**figs. 8 and 9**), they were deliberately showing the historical reality of Christ’s crucifixion, held in common between Christians stemming from the Great Church tradition.

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<sup>74</sup> EDDÉ 2011, 212, 263-69.

<sup>75</sup> PACE 2009; GUIDO 2009.

By analyzing the iconography of the Zhetysu-Semirechye Corpus, we can better understand the beliefs and development of Christianity in Asia. Over a century ago, S.S. Sluskij was first to provide an interpretation of the cross iconography. He assumed that the crosses were merely symbols that vaguely referenced Christian faith, because their “Nestorian heresy” did not allow the Syriac community to depict the divine Christ crucified, in contrast to traditional orthodox artworks. He was very wrong since the opposite was true. This paper explains how the emphasis of the Flowering and the Calvary Cross, as demonstrated at Usharal-Ilbalyk and the Zhetysu-Semirechye Corpus, was directly connected to the historical crucifixion as signified by the Reliquary of the True Cross, in accordance with orthodox medieval practices.

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## Captions

**Fig. 1. S.S. Sluskij's cross typology** (from his 1889 article, Table 3).

**Fig. 2. The *Petros Kayrak***. Turkic Inscription in Syriac characters mentioning "Petros the Priest" from Usharal-*Ilibalyk* (Kazakhstan): **a.** drawing; **b.** photograph; **c.** drawing and photo of the "top" relief (courtesy of Denis Sorokin, Archaeological Expertise LLP).

**Fig. 3. Two representative kayraks**. Discovered at Usharal-*Ilibalyk* with scale comparison (cm) discovered in 2016, depicting Calvary Crosses. **a. Kayrak**, inventory number IB-16-3-1, b. 3-D digital scan and profile; **c. The Shirin Kayrak**,

inscribed “Shirin the Believer”, inv. no. IB-16-3-2, d. 3-D digital scan and profile (courtesy of Denis Sorokin, Archaeological Expertise LLP).

**Fig. 4. Some Cross typology Based on Western Heraldry:** a. flared, b. Bolnisi, c. Maltese, d. Occitan, e. patonce, f. flowering (fleur-de-lis), g. Forked (*croix fourchée*), h. crosslet, i. knobbed (*croix pommée*), j. simple, k. Calvary (*croix péronnée*) (C.A. Stewart)

**Fig. 5. Cross designs at Usharal-Ilbalyk:** a. Calvary Cross (the *Petros Kayrak*); b. Calvary Cross (IB-16-3-1); c. Calvary Cross (the *Shirin Kayrak*, IB-16-3-2); d. Calvary Cross (IB-17-IV-B-3-12); e. Irregular Flared Arm (IB-16-3-5); f. Flared Arm with relic circle (*Yoshmid Kayrak*, IB 17-IV-C-7); g. Flared Arm with relic circle (IB 17-IV-C-8); h. Flared Arm Cross (the *Henanišo' Kayrak*, IB-16-3-6); i. Flared Arm Processional Cross (IB 17-IV-B-3-10); j. Forked Cross (*Petros Kayrak*); k. Knobbed Cross (IB-16-3-7); l. unfinished cross (IB-16-3-3); m. Simple Cross (IB 17-IV-C-1-11); n. simple cross (IB 17-IV-C-6); o. Patriarchal Cross (IB-16-3-4) (drawn by C.A. Stewart).

**Fig. 6. Forked-Cross Processional Cross.** Relief on north exterior wall of the Church of St. Anne (Maronite). 14th century. “Nestorian Quarter”, Famagusta, Cyprus (Photo: C. A. Stewart)

**Fig. 7. Figure Sitting on Lotus Flower Holding a Christian Cross.** Chinese Hanging Scroll. Tempera and Gold on Silk. 153.5 x 58.7 cm. 12th or 13th century. Now at the Temple of Seiun-ji, Kōfu (Japan).

**Fig. 8. Christian Cross (Detail of Figure 7).** Line drawing based on a Chinese Hanging Scroll. Tempera and Gold on Silk. 153.5 x 58.7 cm. 12th or 13th century. Now at the Temple of Seiun-ji, Kōfu (Japan) (C.A. Stewart).

**Fig. 9. Comparison:** a. line drawing of the Zoroastrian Mulla Kurgan Ossuary, found near

Samarkand, Uzbekistan, 7th century AD, now at the Afrasiab Museum, Samarkand; b. line drawing of kayrak image, presumably from Suyab (Kyrgyzstan), now at the Hermitage, St. Petersburg (Russia) ca 1302 (in. no. CA-14296) (C.A. Stewart).

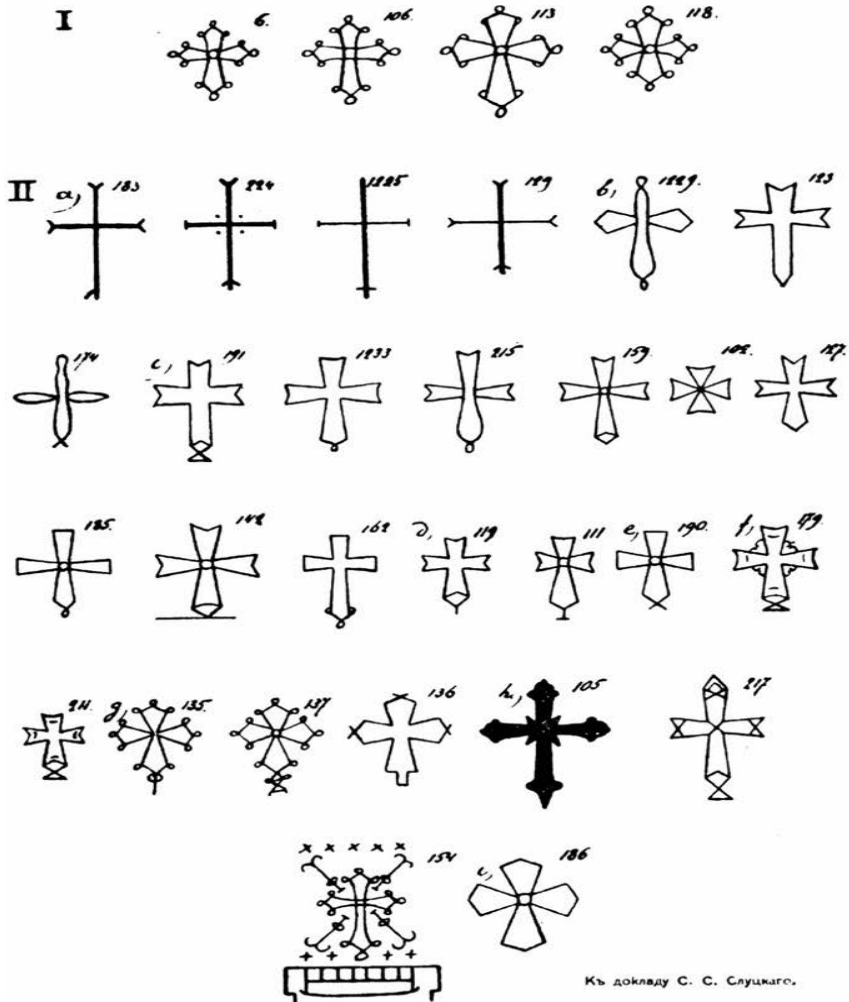
**Fig. 10. Grigorova Plate.** Silver and Gilt Paten with New Testament Scenes and Syriac Script. Found near Perm (Russia), but likely created in Zhetysu-Semirechye region during the 9th or 10th century (diameter 23 cm). Now at the State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg, Inv. No: W-154.

**Fig. 11. Cross Designs from the Zhetysu-Semirechye and China:** From Chu Valley, Musée Guimet Paris, dated to 1324; a.-i. on display in the Balasagun Museum, Kyrgyzstan; j. Issyk Kul (Kyrgyzstan), Armenian; k. inscribed “Cosmas”, Almalyk; l. Quanzhou Maritime Museum (China); m. inscribed “Elizabeth”, Almalyk; n. inscribed “George”, Almalyk, 1365/6; o. Khanbalyk (Beijing Capital Museum, China); p. so-called “Nestorian Stele” from Hsi-an-fu (China). Note: all are from grave monuments; except p. (Sources: a.—h. were drawn from observation by C.A. Stewart; i., k., m. n. from Niu 2006; j. from Giney 2016. l. and p. from Dauvillier 1983.)

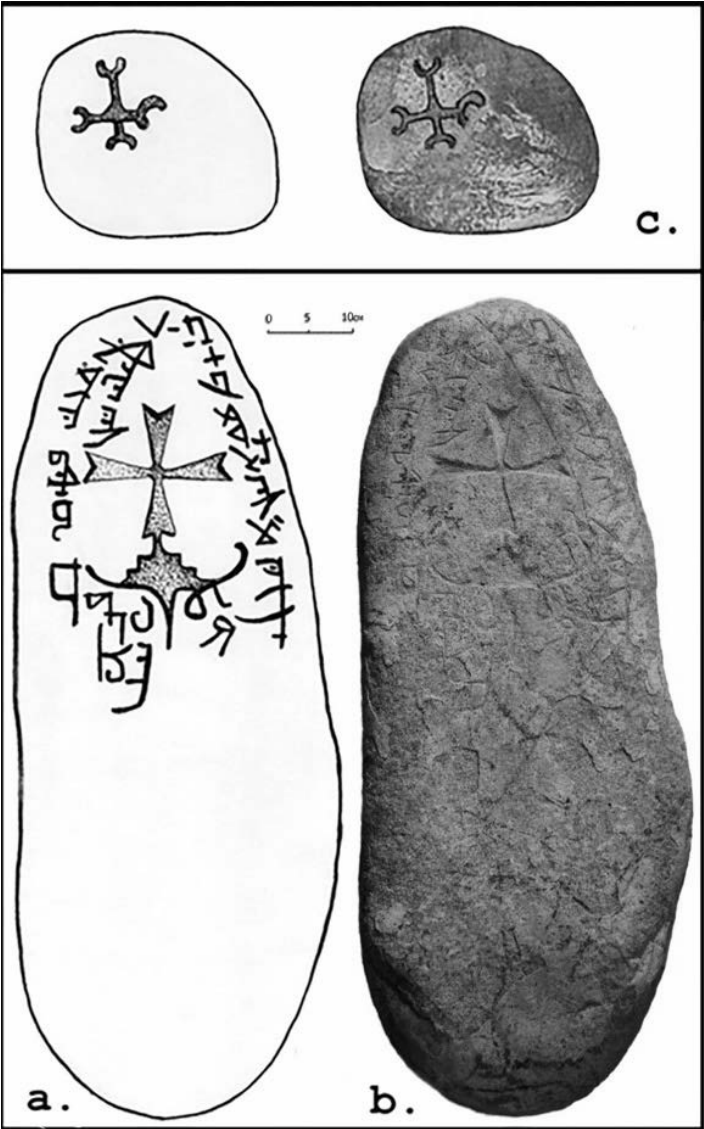
**Fig. 12. The Cross of Calvary:** a. Glass Chalice with Scenes of the Adoration of the Cross, 6th or 7th century; Byzantine Collection, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C. (BZ.1937.21); b. Gold Solidus of the Emperor Heraclius, 630 AD, minted at Constantinople, inscription: VICTORIA AVGUS CON OB [Victoria Augusti, Constantinopoli Obryzum] (4.49 gm).

**Fig. 13.** *Crux Vaticana* (also known as the *Cross of Justin II*), ca. 568 AD, gold, precious stones, and wood. 40 x 30 cm; **a. recto** (front) with base; **b. verso** (back) with “Tree of Life” motif (Treasury Museum of St. Peter’s Basilica, Vatican).

**Illustrations**

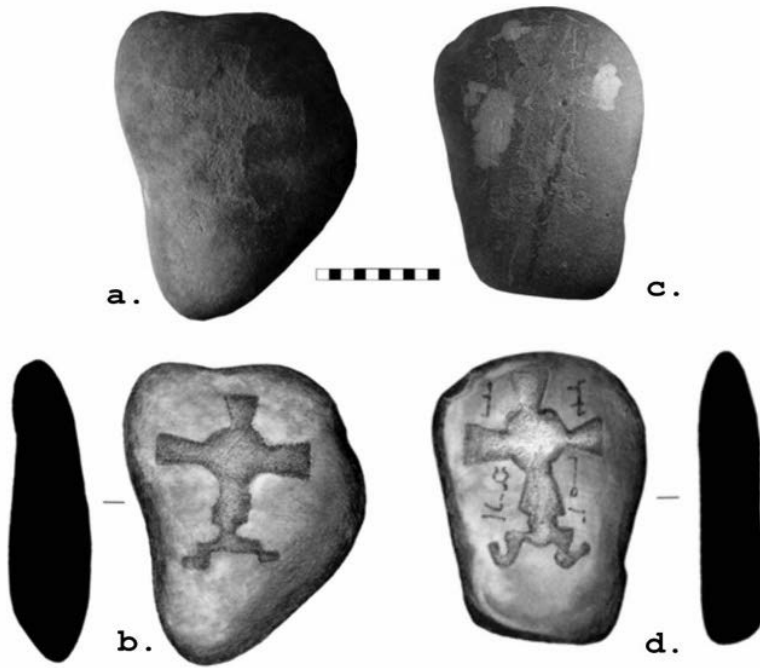


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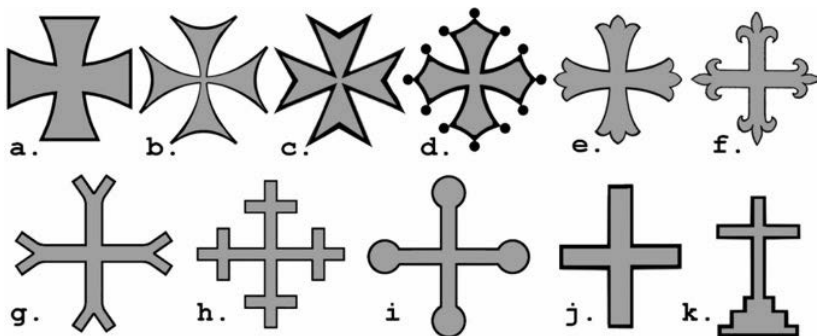


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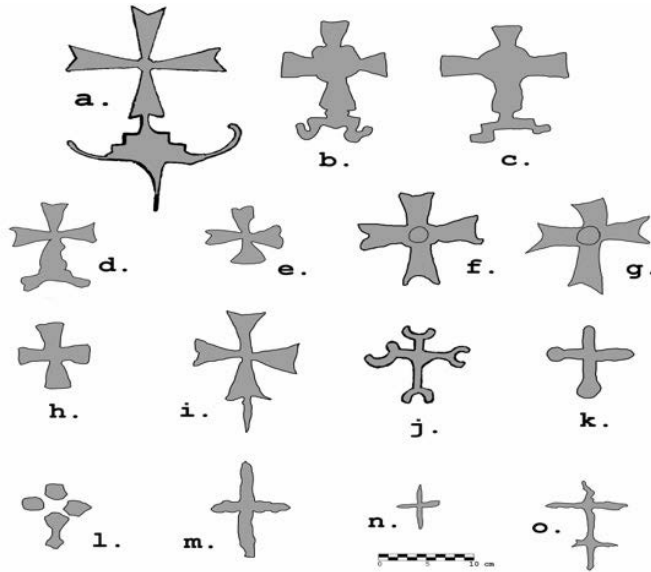




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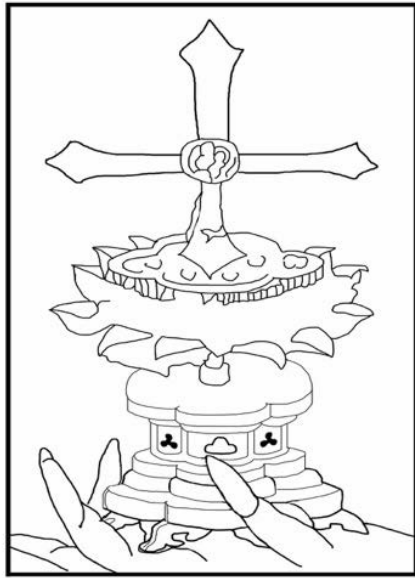
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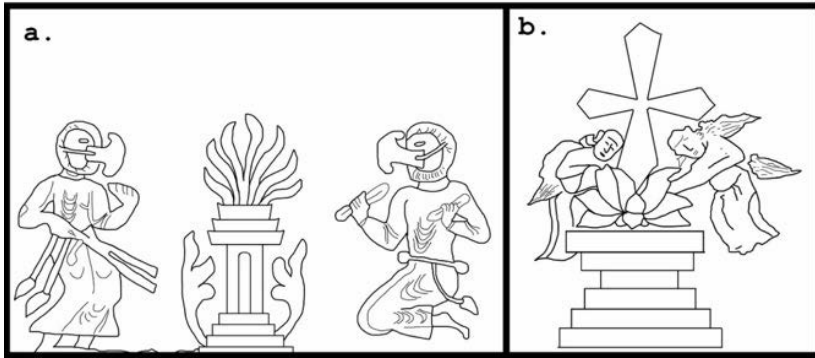
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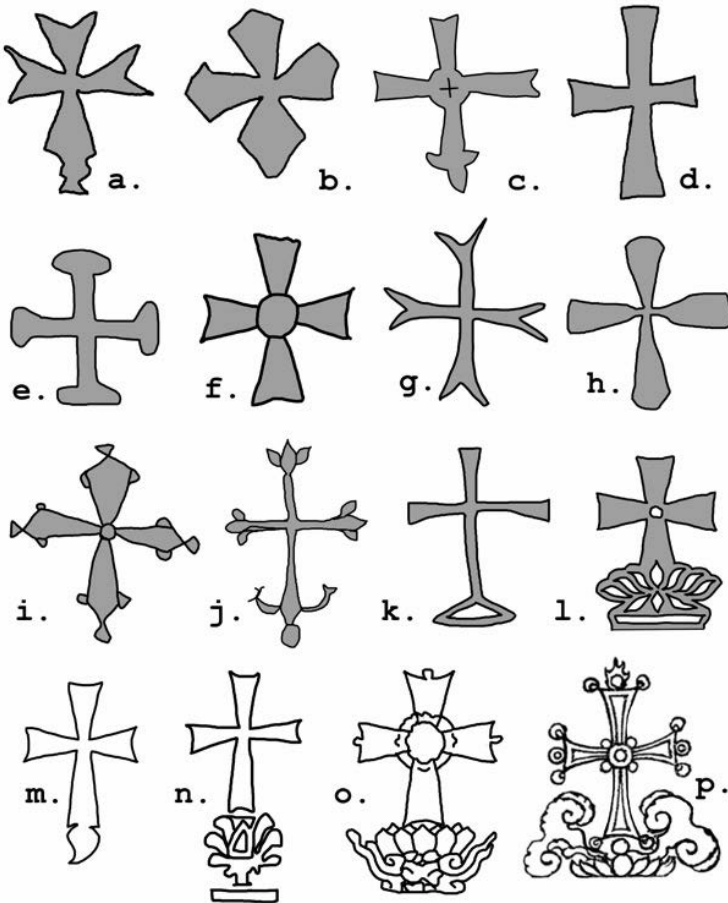
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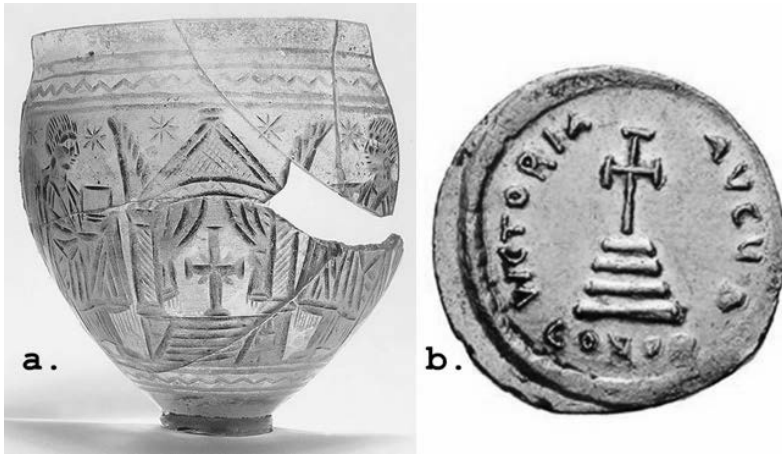
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THE CHURCH OF THE EAST:  
IS THERE A THEOLOGICALLY CONTEXTUAL TYPOLOGY  
FOR CHURCH ARCHITECTURAL FORM EAST OF THE EUPHRATES?

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**Introduction**

Extant remains indicate that separate strands of the Church of the eastern Roman provinces west of the Euphrates River up to the sixth century CE can be distinguished in some cases by the architectural form of their church buildings related in terms of symbolism to the theological doctrine of their commissioners/builders.<sup>2</sup>

Can the same be said for the churches east of the Euphrates? This paper considers the churches of the Tur Abdin;<sup>3</sup> Ctesiphon and Hira;<sup>4</sup> Mosul;<sup>5</sup> Urgut;<sup>6</sup> Ak-Beshim;<sup>7</sup> those on Karg Island,<sup>8</sup> and on Failaka Island.<sup>9</sup> Given that there are few known extant or excavated examples, and apparently relatively minor liturgical differences between the Miaphysite Syrian (Syriac) Orthodox and Diaphysite Church of the East (“Nestorian”),<sup>10</sup> this is difficult to establish. It seems that the Syriac Orthodox Church and the Church of the East, east of the Euphrates shared a distinct architectural form during the 7th and 8th centuries.

It could be expected that some of the various branches of Christianity post-431 CE east of the Euphrates River might be able to be distinguished by the

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank attendees at the 6<sup>th</sup> Salzburg International Conference on Syriac Christianity in China and Central Asia for their comments and suggestions, particularly Valery Kolchenko who kindly allowed me to use plans of the archaeological remains at Ak-Beshim from his presentation and shared the relevant reference publications by himself and Semenov, courtesy of Dr D. Voyakin; and Dr Alexander Tamm, who kindly shared his list of references for early churches in Iraq.

<sup>2</sup> BALDERSTONE 2001; 2004; 2007

<sup>3</sup> BELL & MANGO 1982

<sup>4</sup> REUTHER 1977

<sup>5</sup> FIEY 1959

<sup>6</sup> BAUMER 2016

<sup>7</sup> SEMENOV 2002

<sup>8</sup> MATHESON 2015

<sup>9</sup> VINCENT & SALLES 1991

<sup>10</sup> KHOURY 2019; FIEY 1959



architectural form of their churches. In the former eastern Roman provinces west of the Euphrates before and after the Council of Ephesus of 431, some distinctions can be made. I discovered this through surveying a number of churches and associating them with the commissioning bishop where known, the reigning emperor, or any specific theological controversy at the time of building.<sup>11</sup>

The evidence is thus only circumstantial – unfortunately church builders and commissioning bishops do not seem to have written down anything about their reasons for the type of churches they built. However, in the case of Porphyry, Bishop of Gaza, who was at a loss as to what form his new church to be built on the site of the former pagan temple to Marnas should take, the discussion c. 403 as recorded by Mark the Deacon<sup>12</sup> is illuminating. Some of his congregation counselled that it should take the form of the former temple, which was round with two colonnades, one within the other, with a high dome above the central circle. Porphyry himself had doubts about this proposal and prayed for divine instruction. He was greatly relieved when Eudoxia, wife of the emperor Arcadius, who had been persuaded to fund the reconstruction, sent Porphyry a plan to follow. He then obtained the services of an architect in Antioch, named Rufinus “a believer and well skilled, by whom the whole building was accomplished”.<sup>13</sup> The plan was cruciform and the church was dedicated in 407. It was known initially as the Eudoxiana. This form was a departure from earlier octagonal and circular forms and its use has been interpreted as symbolically representing the “Victory of Christ” from the inscription of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, in his Church of the Holy Apostles.<sup>14</sup>

Some indication of such intentions can perhaps be drawn from any *ekphrases* written after the event but that is hardly conclusive. As an architect working on the surveying and drawing of the excavated remains of ancient churches in the area, I was constantly wondering why there were so many different architectural types. The differences cannot be explained away by functional/liturgical differences because spaces can mostly be adapted to serve as required.

It seemed to me that there must be a reason related to the symbolic meaning of the architectural forms. And it seemed more than likely that the symbolic meaning would be related to the theological doctrine it was to serve. For instance, the introduction of the cruciform plan at Gaza coincided with the reversion from the theological arguments about the nature of the Trinity towards the end of the fourth century to the earlier question of Christ’s humanity/divinity. The use of the cruciform plan emphasised the humanity and suffering of Christ and

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<sup>11</sup> BALDERSTONE 2001; 2004; 2007

<sup>12</sup> MARK THE DEACON, trans. HILL 1913, 75

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 78

<sup>14</sup> SMITH 1950, 108

represented an alternative Orthodox symbol to the use of the triple-apsed sanctuary.

Figure 1 derives from my survey<sup>15</sup> and summarises the types up to the late fifth century. The chronological survey of 111 churches showed a pattern of repeating types, and it could be seen that certain architectural forms could be related to the theological views of power-brokers such as emperors and bishops.

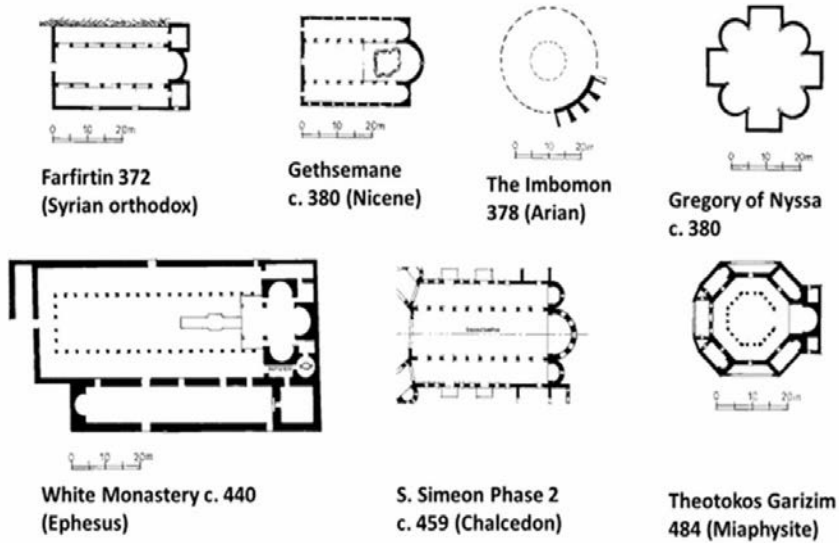


Figure 1: Theological types (Balderstone 2007: 65-69)

The common form in fourth century Syria was the single-apsed basilica as at Farfirtin, and the triple-apsed type occurred at Gethsemane; Mt Sion; Bethesda in Jerusalem and Baalbek in what is now Lebanon, before 400 CE. They relate chronologically to the reign of the Orthodox emperor Theodosius I.

The circular, domed churches – the Golden Dome at Antioch, the Anastasis in Jerusalem and the Imbomon in Jerusalem coincide with the reign of the Arian emperor Constantius II. Gregory of Nyssa produced a centralized plan based on the cross. A key example of new form in the fifth century, coinciding with the Council of Ephesus of 431, is Bishop Shenute's triconch sanctuary at the White Monastery in Egypt.

<sup>15</sup> BALDERSTONE 2007

The triple-apsed type thinned out during the fifth century period dominated by Miaphysism, except for the key example at St Simeon Stylites coinciding with the Council of Chalcedon and one or two others, including in Cyprus. Circular churches began to appear again in the late fifth century, this time dedicated to the *Theotokos*, such as at Garizm.

The key development occurred under Justinian in the sixth century, where the octagonal form deriving from St. Gregory's cross was used for Sts Sergius and Bacchus in Constantinople and ultimately in elongated form at St. Sophia, adapting the domed, triconch formula of Shenute.

### The Syrian/Syriac Orthodox Church

In the Tur Abdin area of eastern Turkey, the Syriac Orthodox Christian denominations are represented by the church of the monastery of the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchal seat at Deir el-Zaferan. The church possibly dates originally from the sixth century. It is square in plan with a projecting apse to the east and inscribed apses to north and south (Figure 2a). By contrast the monastery church of Mar Gabriel of similar date, funded by Anastasius (491-518) has an eastern apse with side chapels and a transverse, brick-vaulted nave (Figure 2b). Bell's record of the churches and Monasteries of the Tur Abdin includes several examples of this type which she classified as the "monastic church type".<sup>16</sup>

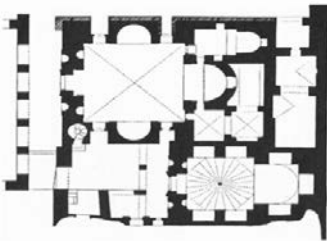


Figure 2a: Deir el-Zaferan, Tur Abdin  
Refounded 793-811, restored 1250  
(after Bell & Mango 1982: 133, Fig. 53)

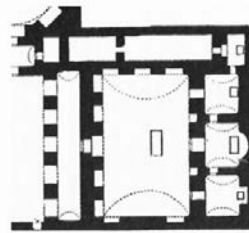


Figure 2b: Mar Gabriel 6<sup>th</sup> century Tur Abdin  
(after Bell & Mango 1982: 7, Fig. 5)

However, there are also several examples of the hall type with longitudinal naves, eastern semi-circular apse and arched recesses along the north and south walls such as Mar Azaziel at Kefr Zeh (Figure 3a). These Bell classified as the "parochial" church type and dated the earliest to c. 700 CE<sup>17</sup>. They appear to derive from the earlier Syrian churches as recorded by Butler, such as St. Julianus at Umm al Jamal (Figure 3b).

<sup>16</sup> BELL & MANGO 1982, ix

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

By the end of the sixth century, Christians east of the Euphrates were divided between Chalcedonians, Miaphysites (“Jacobites”) and the diaphysite Church of the East (“Nestorians”), with the southern areas predominantly Church of the East.<sup>18</sup>

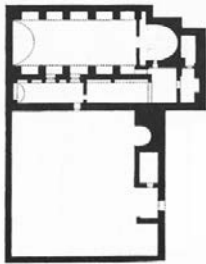


Figure 3a: Mar Azaziel, Kefr Zeh c. 700 CE  
(after Bell & Mango 1982: 14, Fig 8)

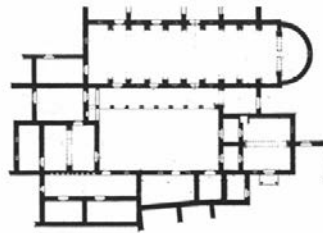


Figure 3b: St Julianus, Umm al Jamal 345 CE  
(after Butler 1969: 18, ill. 11)

### The Church of the East

The Church of the East is represented by the excavated churches at Ctesiphon (Qasr Bint al-Qadi) and Hira as recorded by Oscar Reuther<sup>19</sup> dated to the seventh century. Since Ctesiphon is where the church first achieved official state recognition in the fourth century under Yazdegerd I,<sup>20</sup> it is quite possible that the church’s architectural form derived from Sasanian palace architecture as Reuther proposed.

He postulated that in Iran (Persia) the church plan of nave with two aisles evolved from the longitudinal nave type as passages were cut through the projecting nib walls of the arched recesses along the north and south walls as indicated by the Sasanian building at Damghan<sup>21</sup> (Figure 4a). Reuther pointed out that the feature of arched recesses along the long walls of the nave occurs in the “parochial” churches of the Tur Abdin as at Mar Azaziel and also in the short walls of the “monastic” churches as at Mar Gabriel. The sanctuary was a square room as for the throne room of the Sasanian palace, “presumably domed”,<sup>22</sup> in that case preceded by an aisled iwan.

The monastery site at Bazyan in northern Iraq near Sulaymaniyah includes a church with nave and two aisles separated by substantial columns, dated sixth to

<sup>18</sup> GILLMAN & KLIMKEIT 1999, 79

<sup>19</sup> KIMBALL 1977, 562, Fig. 162a-c

<sup>20</sup> GILLMAN & KLIMKEIT 1999, 113

<sup>21</sup> KIMBALL 1977, 579 Fig. 166

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 579

seventh century, which could also be derived from Damghan. It has a raised bema centrally located in the nave (Figure 4b).

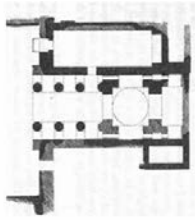


Figure 4a: Damghan Sasanian building 6<sup>th</sup> C?  
(after Kimball 1977: 579, Fig. 166)

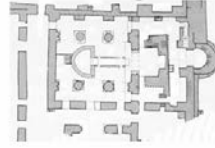


Figure 4b: Church at Bazyan 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> C  
(after Ali & Deroche 2016: 13, Fig. 2)

Reuther considered that the three-nave plan type could not be assumed to relate to the Western basilica although he conceded that this type as exemplified by the basilica at Mayafarqin<sup>23</sup> was also built at Mosul<sup>24</sup> and that familiarity with these may have reinforced the tendency to this form of building.

During the early seventh century under Kosrae II, Miaphysite influence became strong in Persia due to the influx of Syrian captives brought back to Persia following his conquests in Egypt, Syria and Asia Minor.<sup>25</sup> Their main centre was established at Tikrit, and their strongest presence was to the north. But it is not clear whether their Miaphysite beliefs required a different architectural form for their churches. It would be useful to have physical evidence of one of the churches built by the Miaphysite bishop Ahudemeh by permission of Shah Khosrau I before 559 CE,<sup>26</sup> and of churches from the seventh century (which were not subsequently rebuilt) which can be related to the Miaphysite metropolitan bishop Maruta residing in Tikrit, who was named Maphrian of the East and had authority over the Miaphysite dioceses of Mesopotamia and Asia, so as to specifically compare the Church of the East Diaphysite plan with a known Miaphysite plan.

Father J.M. Fiey provided layouts of what he considered to be the liturgical requirements of the Church of the East and its 16<sup>th</sup>-century offshoot, the Chaldean Catholic church and the Syro-Jacobite church – that is the Syrian Orthodox Church, and its 18<sup>th</sup>-century offshoot, the Syriac Catholic church (Figures 5a and 5b). He classed the Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church in the same group in terms of liturgical layout, presumably because they both follow

<sup>23</sup> BELL & MANGO 1982, 58, fig. 40

<sup>24</sup> REUTHER 1977, 564

<sup>25</sup> GILLMAN & KLIMKEIT 1999, 125

<sup>26</sup> BAUMER 2016, 83

the East Syrian rite, even though the Chaldean Catholic Church is in communion with Rome so therefore accepts Chalcedon.



Figure 5a: Chaldean (Church of the East) layout  
(after Fiey 1959: Pl. II)

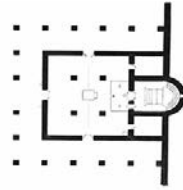


Figure 5b: Syrian (Orthodox) church layout  
(after Fiey 1959: Pl. III)

It seems that the different rites do not require greatly different plans except in the key area of the sanctuary, where the altar in the Syrian Orthodox church is freestanding, has a baldachin over it and seating for the bishop behind it.

Comparison of the Church of the Holy Virgin at the Monastery of the Syrians in Wadi Natrun, Egypt (Figure 6b) with the excavated church at al-Hira (Figure 6c) dating from the seventh century, shows that at the former an earlier Coptic church type with a trefoil plan sanctuary, as found at the White Monastery church in the Thebaid (Figure 6a), was rebuilt/modified to Syrian Orthodox use in the tenth century<sup>27</sup> by the addition of the three chambers at the east end in place of the eastern apse, with a central domed square chamber as the sanctuary, but retaining the north and south apses with central dome as the choir. At Hira, the choir remains in the centre of the nave, as in Fiey's diagrams.

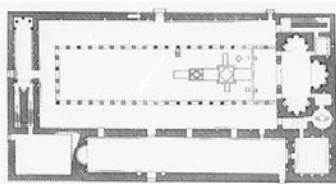


Figure 6a: Dayr Abu Anbar, White Monastery  
(after Grossman 1991: 768)

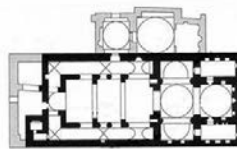


Figure 6b: Church of the Holy Virgin, Deir al-Surian  
(after Dunn 2003)

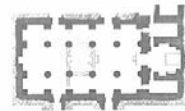


Figure 6c: Excavated church at Hira 7<sup>th</sup> C  
(after Reuther 1977: 562, Fig. 162c)

Fiey also provided plans of a number of churches in Mosul as they existed in 1942 including Mar Hudeni, which he associated with Ahudemeh<sup>28</sup> and believed

<sup>27</sup> INEMÉE 2011

<sup>28</sup> FIEY 1959, 141, Pl. IX

to be one of those founded by the Tikritans of Mosul. However, the date of its foundation is unknown. The existing church has had many alterations - he dated the earliest to the 13th century by the sculpture of the lintel of the Royal Door. The plan encapsulates the Sasanian plan, but the sanctuary has been extended and the altar is now located beyond the original sanctuary and is freestanding. The original sanctuary has been retained as a domed space, now accommodating the choir, reflecting its position at Deir al-Surian. It is not clear whether the new sanctuary space containing the altar is domed. Fiey classed this as being in the Syro-Jacobite group in terms of liturgy following the West Syriac rite. He didn't consider architectural form in terms of symbolism. However, it is clear that the original domed sanctuary expresses the traditional symbolism of the Miaphysite Church.

Fiey's plan of Mar Isa'ya at Mosul, (Figure 7b), classed by him in the Chaldean Church group (originally Church of the East), where he notes the cupola over the sanctuary, indicates that the Church of the East also followed this architectural form.

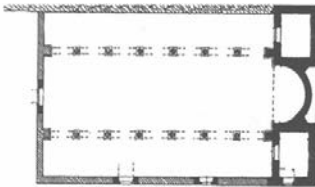


Figure 7a: Farfirtin Church, Syria dated by inscription to 372 CE  
(after Butler 1969: 33-4, ill.32)

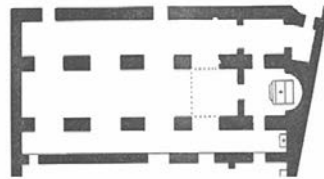


Figure 7b: Mar Isa'ya, Mosul 6th C  
(after Fiey 1959: Pl. IV)

Comparing the Church of the East plan with the earliest Syrian church type representing the theological doctrine of Antioch as documented by Butler at Farfirtin of 372 CE<sup>29</sup> in Jebel Siman (Figure 7a) with the later churches in the north-east as exemplified by the basilica at Zebed associated with Rabula, Bishop of Edessa from 412-435 CE,<sup>30</sup> it can be seen that the basilica at Zebed lacks the chambers either side of the apse in the same way as the Mayafarqin example in the Tur Abdin. Examples of this north Syrian, basilica type have also been excavated at Qasr Serij, north-west of Mosul<sup>31</sup> and Tell Musaifnah<sup>32</sup>, north of Mosul. This spread of the Syrian Orthodox church type across northern Iraq matches literary sources regarding the relative locations of the Syriac Orthodox bishoprics and those of the Church of the East.

<sup>29</sup> BUTLER 1969, 33, Ill. 32

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 39, Ill. 38

<sup>31</sup> OATES 1962, 3 pl. XXVII; SIMPSON 1994, 149-151

<sup>32</sup> SIMPSON 2018, 11-12, Fig.11 quoting NEJIM 1987, 135

On the other hand it can be seen that the excavated church remains dating from the 7th-8th centuries on Kharg Island, Iran<sup>33</sup> and al-Qusur on Failaka island Kuwait<sup>34</sup> (Figure 8a), essentially follow the arrangement shown in the plan of the church at Hira, as do the churches at Veh Artashat;<sup>35</sup> Ain Shai'a,<sup>36</sup> Rahaliya,<sup>37</sup> Sir Bani Yas;<sup>38</sup> Urgut, Uzbekistan<sup>39</sup> and the first church to be uncovered at Ak-Beshim/Suyab, Kyrgyzstan<sup>40</sup> (Figure 8b), thus indicating a distribution of this type from the Persian Gulf to Central Asia.



Figure 8a: Excavated church at al-Qusur on Failaka Island (after Bernard, Callot et Al 1991: 167, Fig. 19)



Figure 8b: Church excavated in 1954 by L.R. Kyzlasov at Ak-Beshim, Kyrgyzstan (after Kolchenko 2018: 59, Puc. 6)

The second church complex to be excavated at Ak-Beshim is dated to the 11th century<sup>41</sup> (Figure 9a). It has a similar plan type to the earlier church at Ak-Beshim. However here, evidence was found for a series of domes along the length of the central nave as well as over the sanctuary.<sup>42</sup> The complex can be compared with Mar Tahmazgerd, Kirkuk,<sup>43</sup> the nave of which is also covered by a series of domes (Figure 9b). At Mar Tahmazgerd the domes were still intact when Bell recorded the church. Bell was unsure about the date, suggesting 8th-9th centuries. Fiey believed it to be later and pointed out that the church she had recorded was not the original church, and had not been rebuilt on its original foundations.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>33</sup> FLOOR & POTTS 2017

<sup>34</sup> BERNARD & SALLES 1991, 7-22, Fig. 1

<sup>35</sup> SIMPSON 2018, 9-11, Fig. 10 quoting KRÖGER 2007, fig. 2

<sup>36</sup> OKADA 1991, fig. 1

<sup>37</sup> SIMPSON 2018, 9-11, Fig. 10 quoting FINSTER & SCHMIDT 1976, fig. 13

<sup>38</sup> ELDERS 2001, 78-79, Pl. XXVII; SIMPSON 1994, 149-51

<sup>39</sup> BAUMER 2016, 171

<sup>40</sup> KOLCHENKO 2018, 60

<sup>41</sup> SEMENOV 2002, 101

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 100 - 108

<sup>43</sup> BELL & MANGO 1982, 74, Fig. 48

<sup>44</sup> FIEY 1959, 121, note 1



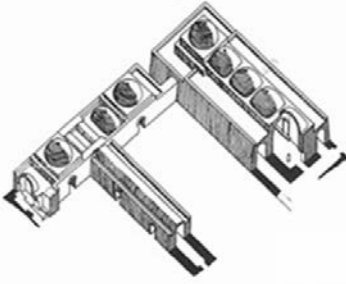


Figure 9a: Church complex at Ak-Beshim, Kyrgyzstan 11<sup>th</sup> C (after Semenov 2002: 101, Puc. 62)

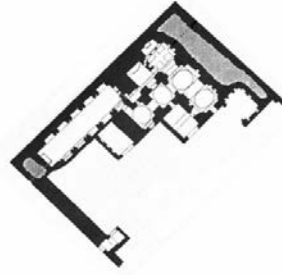


Figure 9b: Mar Tahmazgerd, Kirkuk 11<sup>th</sup> C (after Bell & Mango 1982: 74, Fig. 48)

Given that these examples represent the Diaphysite Church of the East, there needs to be some explanation for following the Sasanian building's domed sanctuary in terms of symbolism. In relation to Persian influences and structural forms, one can see parallels between the Sasanian plan of iwan leading to a domed square room and the Zoroastrian fire temple.

But the issue is not really about whether the church building type derived from the Sasanian forms, but rather how it was perceived by Christians to serve their liturgical and symbolic functional requirements. Fiey<sup>45</sup> has shown that the liturgical requirements could be accommodated in very similar layouts. However, he established clearly that while there was a baldachin over the altar, which was freestanding from the rear wall of the sanctuary in the Syrian Orthodox church, there was no tabernacle over the altar in the Church of the East, and in that case the altar was placed against the rear wall.<sup>46</sup> This suggests a distinct difference in the symbolism attached to the sanctuary, with an emphasis on the symbol of heaven in the Miaphysite Church.

So, in terms of emphasising the divine function of the sanctuary, the dome in the Church of the East seems problematic. In recalling "dome of heaven" symbolism and emphasizing the divine nature of Christ, it could be seen as more appropriate to Miaphysite use and is particularly evident in Armenian and Coptic churches. In relation to Ak-Beshim it is interesting to note that the only bishop's name recorded on the gravestones in the associated cemeteries is Armenian.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps the symbolic use of the dome can be traced through Armenia? While in both Armenia and Georgia the earliest churches followed the basilica model, possibly

<sup>45</sup> FIEY 1959, 94

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 79

<sup>47</sup> DICKENS 2009, 20

reflecting influence from north Syria<sup>48</sup> (Figures 10a & 10b), Christianity is also said to have arrived in Armenia from Cappadocia in the west.<sup>49</sup>



Figure 10a: Kasagh Basilica, Aparan, Armenia 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> C (after Strzygowski 1918: 152, Abb. 172)

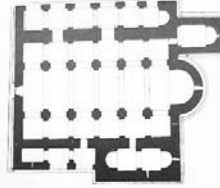


Figure 10b: Bolnisi Church, Georgia 478-493 (after Alpago-Novello et al: 302)

However, fear of being taken over by Byzantium resulted in Armenia's theology being anti-Chalcedonian and following the Council of Ephesus in 431 it settled on the Miaphysite orthodoxy of Cyril of Alexandria,<sup>50</sup> with its emphasis on the divine nature of Christ.

In the early seventh century Komitas I Aghtsetsi, Catholicos and Supreme Patriarch of all Armenians rebuilt the mausoleum of St. Hripsime in Etchmiadzin as a domed, tetraconch church. It is possible that the design of the church merely follows the form of the earlier mausoleum, but there is no evidence of the shape of that earlier structure. The new building was at a time when literary activity in Armenia centred around the Chalcedonian conflict, and attention continued to focus on the translation of Greek sources.<sup>51</sup>

The Catholicos Komitas was a staunch defender of the Armenian Miaphysite doctrine at the Council of Ctesiphon held in 615-6, at which this doctrine succeeded against the Chalcedonians and the Diophysite Church of the East. He is credited with the compilation of the writings of Armenian and foreign church fathers including the three Cappadocian Fathers: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, known as the *Knik Havato* (Seal of faith), which could be used to defend the Armenian Church against the Chalcedonian doctrine.<sup>52</sup> His choice of the domed, Nyssa cross form for the church of Hripsime should perhaps be understood in this context.

<sup>48</sup> ALPAGO-NOVELLO et al 1980 & 1986

<sup>49</sup> ZEKIYAN 1986, 86

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 87

<sup>51</sup> HACIKYAN 2000, 42

<sup>52</sup> ARZOUMANIAN 2014, 54; HACYKYAN 2000, 43

We know from his “Letter to Amphilochios” c. 380<sup>53</sup> that at the time of this letter Gregory of Nyssa in Cappadocia was building a domed, cruciform “Church of the Martyrs”. He described a circle of eight arches in the centre of the cross plan which supported a tall dome covered by a cone. This can be seen to express his concept of the Godhead representing the whole universe in four spatial directions as well as vertically through the dome stretching heavenward.<sup>54</sup> Gregory is recognised as the first Christian theologian to argue for the infinity of God and was known for his allegorical and mystical interpretation of texts. In 380 he was elected as bishop in *Sebaste, Armenia Prima*, (now Sivas in Turkey) but he was there for less than a year before being replaced by his brother Peter. Bell<sup>55</sup> recorded that church No. 8 at Binbirkilisi, Mahalaç in the Karadag, southern Turkey took the domed, cruciform shape. She compared it with the description in Gregory’s letter and noted that it was common to many Armenian churches.<sup>56</sup> This is also clear from the study of architectural typologies in Alpag0-Novello’s volume *The Armenians*.<sup>57</sup> However, the extent to which Gregory’s spiritual theology and church design was available to eastern bishops before translation of his writings from the Greek became readily accessible in the sixth century, is not clear.

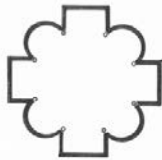


Figure 11a: Cross plan of Gregory of Nyssa c. 380  
(after Lethaby 1912: 85, figure 45)

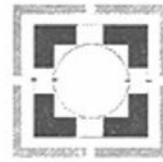


Figure 11b: Qasr-i-Shirin, detail – fire temple plan  
(after Reuther 1977: 553, Fig. 158)

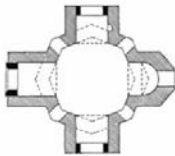


Figure 11c: Church No. 8 Binbirkilisi 6<sup>th</sup> C  
(after Ramsay & Bell 2008: Fig. 55)

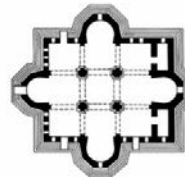


Figure 11d: Etchmiadzin Cathedral 5<sup>th</sup> C  
(after Strzygowski 1918: 333, Abb. 378)

<sup>53</sup> MOOR & WILSON: <https://www.elpenor.org/nyssa/letters.asp?pg=21> (retrieved 23/9/2021)

<sup>54</sup> LADNER 1955, 88-89

<sup>55</sup> RAMSAY & BELL 2008, 99

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv, 431-434

<sup>57</sup> JENI 1986, 193-226

### **Iranian Influence and Zoroastrianism**

Sassanian Zoroastrian influence should also be considered, as suggested by the nearby earlier cathedral of Etchmiadzin. The Zoroastrian fire temple addressed universality with a domed, cruciform plan in a way similar to Gregory's concept, a convergence of ideas that was possibly recognised by monks studying the ancient texts. Brock<sup>58</sup> has discussed the use of fire imagery in Syriac writers such as Aphrahat, Jacob of Serugh and Ephrem. Gregory of Nyssa himself proposed that those who were not baptised before death might still be resurrected after purification by fire.<sup>59</sup>

During excavations, renovations and conservation work undertaken in 1955-56 and 1959 at the cathedral of Etchmiadzin, the pyre of a fire temple was found under the altar of the eastern apse of the earlier fourth century church. The form that this fourth century church took is disputed by scholars due to insufficient archaeological evidence. The current domed, cruciform cathedral was built during the late fifth century (with later additions), and can be seen to be in accordance with both the concept of Gregory of Nyssa and possibly also that of the c. 450 Zoroastrian fire temple previously imposed on the fourth century church by King Yazdegerd II, although it is not clear when the first domed fire temples were built.

According to the *History of the Armenians* by Agathangelos as translated by Robert Thompson,<sup>60</sup> the Armenian kings before the conversion of King Tirdat IV to Christianity were pious Zoroastrians, and the cult was practised continuously from late Macedonian and early Roman times in the former Iranian regions.<sup>61</sup> Although it is not clear when the dome began to be used to roof the fire sanctuaries, Boyce<sup>62</sup> quotes Strabo as having recorded in Cappadocia, shrines for fires that were separate from shrines used for worship of the Persian gods. The square fire sanctuaries were not large and would not be difficult to roof with vernacular dome construction as used for village houses in Armenia and Georgia, which have a smoke hole at the top over the centrally located family hearth (the *hazarashen* in Armenia; *darbazi* in Georgia). This suggests possible beginnings as a purely functional roofing technique over the sacred fire. Whether the dome later assumed a symbolic function is not clear.

The use of the dome in the Miaphysite churches of Armenia and Georgia and the Syrian Orthodox church is not surprising as a symbol of the dome of heaven. But how might it have come to be adopted by the Church of the East? While Armenian

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<sup>58</sup> BROCK 1993, 232, 234, 237

<sup>59</sup> BAGHOS 2012, 125-62

<sup>60</sup> DE JONG 2015, 123

<sup>61</sup> BOYCE & GRENET 1991, Part 3

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 270

influence on the Church of the East is a possibility, or perhaps just the straight adoption of the domed throne hall of Sassanian palaces as discussed above, there is another arguable explanation for the domed sanctuary in the Diaphysite church.

Pirtea<sup>63</sup> describes the mystical tradition of the Church of the East as developed in works by Isaac of Nineveh, John of Dalyatha and others following the awakening of West Syriac theological interest by Syriac translation of Greek ascetical authors. The latter included Evagrius of Pontus, Gregory of Nyssa, Basil of Caesarea and Pseudo-Dionysius. According to Pirtea, reception of the ideas in these texts occurred at a later date in the East Syriac milieu, following the monastic reforms post-550 CE by Abraham of Kashkar.

The context for cross-fertilisation of ideas is exemplified by the East Syriac mystic Joseph Hazzaya, who was born around 710 into a Zoroastrian family<sup>64</sup> and became a monk after an enforced period as a Muslim slave. His writings survive in a few hundred manuscripts of Gnostic chapters. They and those of his contemporary John of Dalyatha caused concern to the Catholicos Timothy I to the extent that the two authors were condemned at a council convened in 786/7 for that purpose. This was subsequently revoked by Timothy's successor. As Sebastian Brock made clear,<sup>65</sup> there has always been interaction between the Christian traditions.

It seems that the church type with domed, cross-plan sanctuary represented at Mosul, Kirkuk, Urgut, Ak-Beshim, Hira, Failaka and Karg Island flourished during the period coinciding with the height of Syriac mysticism during the 7th and 8th centuries and that this type served both the Syriac Orthodox and the Church of the East equally well.

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<sup>63</sup> PIRTEA 2019 (Kindle ed.)

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<sup>65</sup> BROCK 1987: xxxiii

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CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN MEDIEVAL CENTRAL ASIA:  
SYRIAC AND SYRO-TURKIC INSCRIPTIONS  
FROM ZHETYSU AND THE CHUY VALLEY (9<sup>TH</sup> – 14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES)

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## 1. Central Asia in Historical Perspective

### 1.1. Historical Records

Nearly all of the earliest descriptions of Central Asia and its relations to China are found in Chinese historical records. From the Han (202 BC - 220 AD) to the Ming (1368-1644) dynasty, sixteen out of twenty-four Chinese standard dynasty histories provide information on Central Asia known as Xiyu 西域 [the Western Regions]. Although early Chinese records about Central Asia were far from being complete and to a large extent subjective, knowledge about Central Asia was gradually enriched from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century through sources written in Chinese, Greek, Latin, Persian, Armenian and Arabic languages, especially those of travel diaries which provided first-hand information, especially on religions of Central Asia. Travelogues by Buddhist pilgrims (e.g. Faxian and Xuanzang), Franciscan friars (e.g. John of Plani Carpini, William of Rubruck), merchants (e.g. Marco Polo), Arab geographers (e.g. ibn Ḥawqal) and others pioneered this genre of literature.<sup>1</sup> Apart from written records, in the past century, findings through archaeological excavations, especially unearthed coins and funeral inscriptions from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century have supplemented extant literary sources, leaving us with more clues to the economic and religious life of many Central Asians of that time.

The Geography and peoples of Central Asia appeared in *Shiji* 史記 [Records of the Grand Historian], the first Chinese dynasty history completed around 90 BC by Sima Qian 司馬遷. *Shiji* mentions the country of Da Yuan 大宛 (in today's Fergana Valley region) was a fertile agricultural land with grains, vineyard and horses, whereas the Wusun 烏孫 whose habitation was located 2000 *li*<sup>2</sup> to the

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<sup>1</sup> E.g.: Faxian 法顯 (337-422): *Foguoji* 佛國記 [Records of the Buddhist kingdoms], 5<sup>th</sup>; Xuanzang 玄奘 (602-664)'s *Xiyuji* 西域記 [Journey to the Western Regions], 7<sup>th</sup> c; *Changchun Zhenren Xiyouji* 長春真人西遊記 [Changchun Zhenren's Journey to the West] about the journey undertaken by the Taoist monk Qiu Chuji (1193-1256); ibn Ḥawqal (10<sup>th</sup> c.): صورة الأرض *Ṣūrat al-'Ard* [The face of the earth]; *Itinerarium* by William of Rubruck (c. 1215 – c. 1295) and *Il Milione* by Marco Polo (1254-1324).

<sup>2</sup> “*li* 里” is a traditional Chinese unit of distance. 1*li* = 0,5 km.

northeast of Da Yuan in the second century BC were a nomadic people. The people of Kangju 康居 (centered around today's Samarkand) were described as being non-sedentary; and the Wusun possessed good horses, but not as good as the Da Yuan horses which were regarded as heavenly horses by the Chinese.<sup>3</sup>

By the end of the first century AD, the time when *Hanshu* 漢書 [History of the Former Han] was completed, Han-China had come into contact - since the time of Emperor Wudi during the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC - with 36 countries in the Western Regions to which *Hanshu* devoted two sections under the title “Xiyu zhuan 西域傳”.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the military campaigns geared mainly towards the Xiongnu, Han-China began to develop trade relations with the Western Regions. The northern trade route ran from Cong Ling (the Pamir/Onion Range) to the Fergana Valley (Da Yuan) and Samarkand (Kangju) as well as to Yancai 奄蔡 (Alani?), 2000 *li* northwest of Samarkand.<sup>5</sup> This route led further west to Daqin,<sup>6</sup> which referred roughly to the Roman Orient.

## 1.2. Peoples

Central Asia in ancient and medieval times was frequented and occupied by various peoples, nomadic or sedentary, and witnessed the rise and fall of their kingdoms and states. Persians, Sogdians, Bactrians, Tocharians, Turks, Hephtalites, Armenians, Arabs, Indians, Mongols and Chinese all left their footprints and played their part in shaping the history of Central Asia. The sixth century saw the rise of the Kök Türks<sup>7</sup> who built their Turkic Khanate, which became a Steppe empire with its power spreading through north and central Asia. In their heyday, the Kök Türks made frequent attempts to attack China. The Sui dynasty of China was confronted with frequent military invasions from the Kök Türks. The Sui court took advantage of the internal power struggle for the throne of the Khanate within the Kök Türks and supported Yami Khaghan. In 581, as a result of wars and internal division, the Turkic empire split into East and West Turkic Khanates. The Western Turks occupied the Chuy valley and had their summer capital in Nevakat and the principal capital in Suyab (in today's Kyrgyzstan).

The Chuy valley, especially, the area centred around Suyab<sup>8</sup> (today's Ak Beshim in Kyrgyzstan) on the southern bank of the Chu River served as one of the four

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<sup>3</sup> *Shiji* vol. 123: Da Yuan. See link: <https://ctext.org/shiji/da-wan-lie-zhuan/zh>

<sup>4</sup> *Hanshu* vol. 96/1&2

<sup>5</sup> *Hanshu* vol. 96

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> 古突厥 also known as the Blue Turk or Celestial Turk.

<sup>8</sup> known in Chinese as 碎葉城, 素葉 etc.; located in today's Ak Beshim, 8 km to the southwest of Tokmok in Kyrgyzstan.

garrisons of China's Tang Dynasty from AD 679 to 719.<sup>9</sup> Chinese coins issued between AD 621-927 were unearthed within the walled city and at a former Buddhist temple site as well a former church site in Ak Beshim<sup>10</sup> pointing to the time when Suyab was the Anxi General Protectorate of Tang-China. Ak Beshim is identified as the ancient site of Suyab,<sup>11</sup> which is mentioned in Chinese historical writings. Before the 6<sup>th</sup> century, Suyab was most probably inhabited by Sogdians who engaged in trade.<sup>12</sup> However, during the 6<sup>th</sup> and early part of the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, local inhabitants were subject to the Western Turks. Xuanzang 玄奘 (fl. 602 -664), the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim who passed by Suyab at the end of the third decade of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, described in his travelogue that Suyab was 500 *li* to the northwest of the Pure Lake 清池 (Issyk Kul) and in the six to seven *li* radius of Suyab. He also mentioned that Hu (Sogdians and others) merchants lived in mixed settlements in Suyab, and to the west of Suyab there were dozens of isolated towns with their own chieftains, but they were all subject to the Tujue (Western Turks). Xuanzang traveled from Suiye (Suyab) to Chach<sup>13</sup> (Today's Tashkent) in the land of Suli 率利 (Soghd/Sogdiana) where, he said, the name of the language was the same as the name of the land. The language had 20 or more letters according to Xuanzang.<sup>14</sup> He may have meant the Sogdian language.

Before the Arab conquest, Central Asia was in no sense a unified place. It was rather a culturally, religiously and ethnically diverse region.<sup>15</sup> The discovery of Sogdian, Chinese and Karakhanid coins at the archaeological site of Ak Beshim, the former city of Suyab reveals the trade relations among various peoples in the region. The Sogdian coins bear the legend in the Sogdian language; four kinds of Chinese coins with different legends were issued from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century; and the Karakhanid coins belonged to the period from 1025-1050<sup>16</sup> when Suyab was under the Turkic Karakhanate.

The advent of Islam in Central Asia reshaped the political and religious landscape of Central Asia. Islamization took place among various ethnic communities. After the middle of the 8<sup>th</sup> century, Arab and Islamic influence began to take root in

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<sup>9</sup> There are scholarly debates about the time of setting up and abandoning of Suyab, the Anxi Protectorate by Tang-China. *Jiu Tangshu* 舊唐書 vol. 198 states that Suyab was first set up in the 22nd year of the Zhenguan period (649 AD).

<sup>10</sup> CLAUSON 1961, 9. The coins had the legend of Kaiyuan tongbao 開元通寶

<sup>11</sup> CLAUSON 1961, 4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> 羯霜那國, also called 史國, 碣石 (stone city), today's Tashkent in Uzbekistan.

<sup>14</sup> Here Tujue should mean the Western Turks. See Xuanzang's *Datang Xiyuji* 大唐西域記 [Journey to the West] vol. 1, "Suiye" <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=308791>

<sup>15</sup> THROWER 2004, 43.

<sup>16</sup> CLAUSON 1961, 10. Previously, E. Chavanne identified Suyab to be today's Tokmak as Chinese coins were found in Tokmak as well. See CHAVANNES 1909, 10.

Central Asia. Further west in Central Asia, Khorasan and Transoxiana came under the Sunni Samanid rule from 819-999. The Samanid empire was first ruled within the Abbasid Caliphate, but later became independent of the Abbasids. By the 9<sup>th</sup> century, Transoxiana, the land of the Sogdians was regarded as a Muslim region. During the 10<sup>th</sup> century, the Sogdian language, the original language of the Sogdians in Transoxiana was replaced by Arabic,<sup>17</sup> but in Samarkand there were still Jewish, Zoroastrian, Christian and Manichean communities.<sup>18</sup> In the same period, there was a Christian settlement to the south of Samarkand and a monastery in Urgut<sup>19</sup> in today's Uzbekistan.

Zhetysu (Semirejchie), meaning "seven waters" in Kazakh (*Russian*: Semiryechye; *Chinese*: 七河) was a historical region encompassing the part of Central Asia south of the Lake Balkhash and east of Transoxiana, named after the fact that the seven rivers there flow to the Balkhash. It falls into roughly the Almaty region of today's south-eastern part of Kazakhstan, historically also including the Ili prefecture in Today's Xinjiang. From the third century BC to the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD, various Indo-European peoples such as the Saka 塞人, the Yuezhi 月氏 and the Wusun 烏孫 occupied and dwelt in Zhetysu.<sup>20</sup> After the 6<sup>th</sup> century, various Turkic tribes began to migrate to the Zhetysu area.

During the 8<sup>th</sup> century the nomadic Karluks (Qaluqs 葛邏祿), one of the tribes among the Western Turks, migrated to this region.<sup>21</sup> At the battle of Talas in 751, when the Abbasid army confronted the Chinese army, the Karluks who had initially allied with the Chinese army and were stationed in the Anxi Protectorate (Suyab), decided to collude with the Arabs and attacked the Chinese army from behind, leading to the defeat of the Chinese army. In 766, the Karluks rose to be the dominant Turkic force in Zhetysu and the Chu River basin.<sup>22</sup> They were joined by fifteen clans of the Uighur tribe,<sup>23</sup> who fled from Upper Mongolia after the Kirgiz overthrew their Khanate in 840. The following four centuries before the Mongol conquest saw the rise and fall of the Karakhanid Turkic Khanate (9<sup>th</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup> centuries) established by the Karluks, Uighurs and some other Turkic groups with their centres in Balassagun (today's Burana in Kyrgyzstan) and Kashgar (in today's Xinjiang).

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<sup>17</sup> Also called Tayy or Tazik

<sup>18</sup> BARTHOLD 1956, 15-16. See also *Hudūd al 'Ālam* transl. MINORSKY 1937, 95

<sup>19</sup> BARTHOLD 1956, 16.

<sup>20</sup> *Shiji* Vol. 123. Cf. footnote No.2. See also BARTHOLD 1956, 74-77.

<sup>21</sup> *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 Vol 233: "...至德後，葛邏祿浸盛，與回紇爭強，徙十姓可汗故地，盡有碎葉，怛邏斯諸城..." [After the the Zhide period (756-758), Karluks prospered and rivaled against the Uighurs. They migrated to the original territory of the Kaghan of the Onoq, which included Suyab, Talas and other towns.]

<sup>22</sup> See also: *Hudūd al 'Ālam* mentioned the land of the Karluks in Central Asia. See *Hudūd al 'Ālam* translated by MINORSKY 1937, §15. Cf. BARTHOLD 1956, 87.

<sup>23</sup> *Xin Tangshu* 新唐書 Vol 233: Huigu

### 1.3. Under the Kara Khitai and the Mongols

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, a strong force from the Far East, the Kara Khitai 喀刺契丹, invaded the Chuy Valley and Zhetysu. Known in medieval Muslim sources as the Kara Khitai (the Black Khitai),<sup>24</sup> their dynasty was established in 1130 by Yelü Dashi 耶律大石, a former officer of the Khitai Liao Dynasty 西遼 (907-1125) in the east after the Khitai had been conquered in 1125 by the Jurchens, another rising power in the Far East. In the subsequent decades, the Kara Khitai, a predominantly Buddhist nation with a branch of “Nestorian” Christian Naiman tribe, became the overlord in Central Asia overpowering east and west of Turkestan, which included Zhetysu and the Chuy Valley and ruled over the Karakhanate which later became the first Turkic Khanate to embrace Islam in the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1.4. The Mongol Conquest

The Mongols defeated Kara Khitai in 1218.<sup>25</sup> As the Mongols advanced westwards, during the second decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Zhetysu, the Chuy river region, the Uighur Kingdom of Qocho in Turfan all submitted to the Mongols. The sons of Chinggis Khan Jochi, Chatagai all had their camps (*ordu*) in Zhetysu.

At the death of Chinggis Khan in 1227, the part of Central Asia that included the Tarim Basin (the former Uighur Kingdom of Qocho), the Chuy Valley, Zhetysu (the former Kara Khanate), Transoxiana, etc., were all inherited by Chagatai Khan (ca. 1183 – 1242), one of the sons of Chinggis Khan and the area became the Chagatai Khanate of Central Asia. In 1320, the Chagatai Khanate was split into Eastern Chagatai Khanate which included the area of the Rivers of Ili and Chu, Tianshan and the Tarim Basin, whereas Western Chagatai Khanate covers Transoxiana. In the meantime, the Mongols in these areas underwent a process of Turkicisation and Islamisation.

## 2. Christianity in Central Asia: Written Sources

### 2.1. Pre-Islamic Sources

Historical written sources on how Christianity reached Central Asia are sporadic, sketchy and fragmentary. One of the first people who knew of Christians in Central Asia was the Syriac author Bardaisan (154 - 222 AD) who, as early as AD 196, mentioned Christians in Gilian (south of the Caspian Sea) and in the realm of the former Kushan Empire<sup>26</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> centuries) in his *Books of the Laws of Countries*.<sup>27</sup> Another mention of Christian influence in India, Persia and among

<sup>24</sup> See Juvaini's *Tarik-i jahangusha*, translated J. BOYLE (1997), 354-361.

<sup>25</sup> For a biography of Küchlüg, see TANG 2009

<sup>26</sup> Known in Chinese records as Guishuang Kingdom 貴霜. The kingdom covered the area of today's Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal and northern India.

<sup>27</sup> For Bardaisan's the “Book of the Laws of Countries”, see *Patr. Syr. ii.* 1907, 607 (Syriac text); DRIJVES 2007, 60. MINGANA 1925, 301. TANG 2018

the Huns and Scythians is found in a letter sent in 403 by the Latin church father Jerome from Bethlehem to Laeta in Rome. He wrote that

*De India, Perside, et Aethiopia monachorum quotidie turbas suscipimus; deposuit pharetras Armenius, Hunni discunt Psalterium, Scythiae frigora fervent calore fidei...*<sup>28</sup>

From India, Persia and Ethiopia, we receive crowds of monks daily; the Armenians have laid aside their quivers; the Huns learn the Psalter and the frosts of Scythia are warmed with the heat of the faith.

These reports were from the West, as Christianity had not reached the eastern end of Central Asia on a large scale, especially the Chuy Valley and Zhetysu by the 7<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2.2. Church of the East's Own Sources

More internal evidences provided by the Church of the East itself have survived in the form of synod records of the period between 410 and 775, later collected in *Synodicon Orientale*<sup>29</sup> which was compiled in Syriac at the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The signatures of the bishops who represented their respective dioceses at these meetings can help us mapping the geographic locations of these dioceses, especially of those eastern dioceses, thus providing a picture of the spread of Christian communities in Central Asia. For example, at the Synod of Dadisho in 424, more bishops from Central Asia (especially the area between today's eastern Iran and northwest Afghanistan) were present, representing Merv, Herat, Segestan (Sistan) and Abrshahr etc.<sup>30</sup>

Merv (in today's Turkmenistan) became the starting point for Christian missions towards the East in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Christian churches in Central Asia and China created organised structures that remained "incontestable, historic, literal and archaeological evidence."<sup>31</sup> Christian missions towards Central Asia and China most likely started from Merv and Herat, the two oasis cities along the ancient trade route from Khorasan (including Merv, Herat and Balkh), to Sogdiana (Transoxiana), Zhetysu, Turkistan and the Gansu Corridor leading to interior China. Major towns of Central Asia were located along this trade route, such as Merv, Samarkand (Afrasiab), Pendzhikent, Urgut, Otrar, and Taraz, some of which became the staging posts for Christian missions.

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<sup>28</sup> MIGNE 1845, 870.

<sup>29</sup> The record has survived in a single manuscript "Alqosh Syr. 169", now kept in the Monastery of the Chaldeans in Baghdad. A copy of it was brought to the Vatican by Joseph David in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has a shelf-mark of "Vat.Borg.Sir 81-82". Two translations of the original Syriac records: into French by J.-B. Chabot and into German by O. Braun. Cf. VAN ROMPAY 2011.

<sup>30</sup> CHABOT 1902, 285 (French), 43 (Syriac); BRAUN 1975, 46; TANG 2020, s.v. Asia, Central.

<sup>31</sup> CONMENO 2004, 47.





Here the country of Tibetans referred more likely to the Dunhuang and Gansu Corridor area which was occupied by the Tibetans from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> century, than to the Tibetan Plateau.

In the letter to the monks in the monastery of Mar Moran (written between 795-798), while discussing the controversy about whether one should add that extra sentence of "...crucified for us" to the hymn of Trisagion, Timothy I again mentioned about Christians in Babylon, Persia, Assyria and in all the regions of the Orient among the Indians, Chinese, Tibetans and Turks. These Christians, according to Timothy I, chanted the Trisagion with no addition of the sentence 'crucified for us'.<sup>34</sup> Apart from these general references to Christians in Central Asia and the Far East, more concrete descriptions about the churches in these areas from the Church of the East itself hardly exist or have survived.

### 2.3. Muslim Sources

After the Islamic conquest of Central Asia in later part of the 7<sup>th</sup> century, the inhabitants of Transoxiana began to convert to Islam. From the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century during the Islamic golden age of the Abbasid Caliphate, Muslim historians and geographers flourished. Among the historians and geographers of the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Ibn Haukal/Hawqal<sup>35</sup> and Narshakhi gave detailed and vivid descriptions of the economic geography, i.e., towns and villages, peoples and religions of Transoxiana. A few of their accounts also mentioned Christians in Central Asia.

Writing in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, Ibn Hawqal described a Christian church near Herat<sup>36</sup> and Samarkand, the capital of Soghd, was a Muslim country and Islam had extended as far as Taraz.<sup>37</sup> However, there was a Christian settlement at the village of Sarouan سروان which "is a mountain on the south of Samarcand...At Sarouan is a place which the Christians have built for religious worship, and which is richly endowed. This is called زروکرد Zarukird".<sup>38</sup> Some of them came from Iraq. And there was another Christian settlement near the border to Tashkent.<sup>39</sup>

Another main city in Central Asia was Bukhara for which a history was written by the 10<sup>th</sup> century Sogdian scholar Narshakhi who wrote a history of Bukhara.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> BIDAWID 1956, 117 (Latin text); p. 36. (Syriac Text).

<sup>35</sup> Ibn Haukal's *Kitab al-Mesalek al-Memalik* originally written in Arabic. See IBN HAUKAL - OUSELEY 1800, 269.

<sup>36</sup> IBN HAUKAL - OUSELEY 1800, 218.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid. 269.

<sup>38</sup> IBN HAUKAL - OUSELEY 1800, 257.

<sup>39</sup> BARTHOLD 190, 31.

<sup>40</sup> The *History of Bukhara (Tarikh-i Bukhara)* was written in by Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Jafar Narshakhi (a Sogdian) in Arabic in A.H.332/AD943 by Narshakhi but was lost. It was translated

According to Narshakhi, the Arabs began to conquer Bukhara from Khurasan in the last quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>41</sup> *The History of Bukhara* describes that “When you enter the city proper, at the entrance to the city proper, the first quarter to the left is called ‘the quarter of the rogues.’<sup>42</sup> Before this time a Christian church was there, but now it is a mosque of the Banī Ḥazala”.<sup>43</sup> At the time of Narshakhi’s writing, the city of Bukhara had already many mosques and Muslims at the beginning of their conversion read the Qu’ran in Persian as they could not understand Arabic.<sup>44</sup>

#### 2.4. Medieval Travelogues

One of the legacies of the Mongol conquest in the 13<sup>th</sup> century was the unification of Eurasia. Under the Mongol Empire communication and travel across Eurasia became smooth. From Europe Christian missionaries, diplomats, merchants began to travel along the trade routes between East and West. As a byproduct of this travel fever, another wave of travel literature swept through Europe and Asia. Travel journals, official and private letters became a source of information on the political, economic, cultural and religious life of the communities along the trade routes.

On Christians in Central Asia, William of Rubruck, the Franciscan friar who traveled to the Mongol court in the middle of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, recorded a town called Cailac in the country of Oganum. The people there used to have a language and letters of their own. The Nestorians there used to write their books in those letters (Sogdian or Syriac). When Rubruck passed by Cailac, the place was already occupied by the Turks. Cailac or Qayaligh corresponds to Qapal/Kopal in the Almaty region of Kazakhstan today. But, according to Rubruck, among the mountains east of Organum, the Uighurs lived there and all their towns there was a mixture of Saracens (Muslims) and Nestorians.<sup>45</sup>

Among medieval European travelers to the East, Marco Polo should be counted as the most diligent observer who paid a particular attention to the religious groups in every town and village he traversed. Marco Polo traveled from Venice to China between 1271 and 1295. His travel account *Il Milione* mentions Buddhist, (Nestorian) Christian and Muslim (Saracen) communities in the towns, villages and cities in Yuan-China. However, for Central Asia, the account only

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into Persian by al-Qubāvī in 522/1128-9. The current translation by Richard Frye was based on Persian editions which have survived. cf. Frye’s introduction to his translation.

<sup>41</sup> NARSHAKHI (10<sup>th</sup> c.) - FRYE 1954, 37.

<sup>42</sup> Referring to the fire-worshippers (Zoroastrians). See *ibid*, 53.

<sup>43</sup> NARSHAKHI (10<sup>th</sup> c.) - FRYE 1954, 53. PRISAK (1951), 289.

<sup>44</sup> NARSHAKHI (10<sup>th</sup> c.) - FRYE 1954, 48.

<sup>45</sup> MICHEL & WRIGHT 1839, 281-282 (Latin);

describes Christians and Saracens in Samarkand, Kashgar and Yarkand, as he traveled from Persia through Afghanistan to China. He did not traverse Zhetysu.

Marco Polo's account mentions three cities in Central Asia within the Chagatai Khanate where he saw Christians: Kashgar, Yarkand and Samarkand. In Kashgar, "beside the Mahometans, live some Turks who are Nestorian Christians who have their own churches and religion, who observed the Greek rule"<sup>46</sup> but in Yarkand there were a small number of Nestorians and Jacobites.<sup>47</sup> Samarkand seemed to be the main centre of Christianity in Central Asia. Christians lived side by side with Muslims. Marco Polo described a 'great and noble round church' called St. John the Baptist Church in Samarkand and he also gave a narrative of disharmony between Christians and Saracens, the latter were ten times as many as Christians.<sup>48</sup>

### **3. Christianity in Central Asia: Archaeological Discoveries**

A site of a "Nestorian" Christian Church was discovered in Suyab (modern day Ak Beshim) in the Chuy Valley.<sup>49</sup> In recent years, archaeological excavations have revealed a medieval Christian graveyard in Usharal (Ilybalyk) near Zharkent in Eastern Kazakhstan.<sup>50</sup>

What is more, since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until very recently, hundreds of medieval Christian tombstones with Syriac or Syro-Turkic inscriptions have been unearthed in the Chuy Valley and Zhetysu. The most extensive collections of these stones were published by Daniel A. Chwolson (1819-1911). In the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, prints of the drawings and the photographs of these tomb inscriptions from various sources reached St. Petersburg and were studied by Chwolson. Between 1886 and 1897, Chwolson deciphered and published successively 568 out of 610 inscriptions engraved in Syriac or Syro-Turkic languages. His publication of 1886 deals with 22 stones, 6 of them have photograph images. In his follow-up publication in 1897, he also published photographs of 60 stones.<sup>51</sup> The original tombstones have been scattered in

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<sup>46</sup> MOULE & PELLIOU 1938, 143. Those observing the Greek rule may well refer to the Melkite Christians.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 144. The Jacobite Christians are Syriac Orthodox Christians or West Syrian Christians.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* 144-146.

<sup>49</sup> KOLCHENKO 2017, 20.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. STEWART 2022; GILBERT 2022.

<sup>51</sup> See CHWOLSON 1886 & 1897



calendar and then providing the name and sometimes information about the deceased, such as their professions, titles etc. For those who did not have a title or position, a general term “believer or a Christian” (mhaymnā for a male /mhaymāntā for a female, ܡܗܝܡܢܐ/ܡܗܝܡܢܐ) was used. Some of the inscriptions were also dated according to the Turkic calendar using the 12-animal year cycle. Others were dated in both the Seleucid and the Turkic calendars. Most of the inscriptions were in Syriac, some were in a combination of Syriac and Turkic, but all written in the Syriac script.

### 3. Analyse of the Epitaphs

#### 3.1. Dating

Most of the stones were inscribed with a date of the death year, though some were not. Surveying all the dates inscribed on these stones has helped to reveal a rough period when the cemeteries were in use. The dates range from 1169 of the Greeks/AD 858, the earliest so far, to 1653 of the Greeks/AD 1342. But within 1338 and 1339 most of the deceased died of the Plague (ܡܘܬܘܬܐ ܕܡܘܬܐ dmith bmawtānā). Apart from two stones which dated back to AD 858 and AD 911, all other tombstones fall within the period from the late 13<sup>th</sup> to the early 14<sup>th</sup> century.

#### 3.2. The Deceased

The content of the epitaphs provides the name, title, position, the year of death and sometimes the cause of death of the person. Some information about the Christian communities in these villages can be reconstructed from the funeral inscriptions.

*Positions and Titles:* Most of the titles are ecclesiastical ones. The highest ecclesiastical title among them was the Chorepiscopus, which was held by someone called Johanan,<sup>58</sup> whose tombstone has not been found or identified with full certainty. He was only mentioned in the epitaphs of his family members. The last epitaph (No. 22) with 11 lines of Old Turkic inscription listed in Chwolson’s 1886 publication mentions his title and name, i.e., “Mar Johanan”. “Mar(y)” (my lord) is an honorific title for a clergyman who holds the ecclesiastic position of a bishop and above in the Syriac tradition. However, due to the bad quality of the printed photograph, Chwolson could not fully transcribe the content of this Turkic funeral inscription.

A hierarchy of the clergy in this region can be reconstructed from the available funeral inscriptions with Mar Johanan as the highest-ranking clergyman. Apart from the ecclesiastical titles mentioned in these inscriptions, there are also a few who had administrative and military titles. The following table gives a selected list of these titles and positions. Since there are many who had the title “qaššišā”

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<sup>58</sup> CHWOLSON 1897, 91, no. 79.



The **Tunga** Family: Family members seemed to have occupied the administrative position of the church, as “overseers of the church” or “heard of the church”, riš<sup>c</sup>edta, and teachers. The name suggests a Turkic origin.

Name	Death Year	Position	Chwoslon 1897
Altun Tunga	year of the rooster (1512/1201)	riš <sup>c</sup> edta/ head of the church	No. 2
Philipus, son of the overseer Tunga	1264		No.8
Tunga, son of malfānā (teacher) Johanan	1279		No. 17
Tunga	1297	Servant	No. 39
Matai		Son of Tunga, church overseer	No. 251

The **Sauma** Family: This family seems to be a priestly family with Syriac names. There were priests and teachers from this family. The highest position held by this family members was Chorepiscopus, a country bishop whose tomb was not found. He seemed to have married twice. His first wife died in 1298 and his (second) bride was Julia who died in 1307. Julia’s tombstone was listed in Chwolson’s publication in 1886.

Name	Death Year (AD)	Position	Remark
Giwārgis, son of Sauma	1264	Scholar, student	No. 7
Māifrah <span>ܡܝܝܫܐ</span>	1282 horse year	Wife of priest Sauma	No.19
Kustanz Sauma	1298	Wife of Chorepiscopus Johanan Sauma	No. 40
Kutuk	1316	Daughter of Chorepiscopus	No. 79
Julia	1307	Bride of Chorepiscopus Johanan	No. 7 (Chwolson 1886)
Johanan Sauma		Chorepiscopus	tombstone not found or identified

The **Ispahsalar** ܐܝܫܫܐܠܐܪ Family: Ispahsalar is a Persian title for a senior military commander. Although this was a Persian title (mostly used in the Muslim world), Ispahsalar’s mother had a Greek name called Kustans ܟܘܨܬܐܢܫ. It is highly likely that she was from an aristocratic Greek family. The women in this family had Greek names, too. They were Christian, as their tombstones were

engraved with crosses. The name of this army commander (Ispahsalar) is not known as he was called by his title. The daughters bore the name Kustanz and there was also a woman who had the Turkic title “Khatun”, a title for the wife of a Khan or a ruler. This Khatun was most likely the wife of the Ispahsalar. In 1339, there was another deceased woman who had a Persian name “Mirza” and who was the wife of the Ispahsalar, Johanan Tegin Beg.<sup>61</sup> The term “Beg/Bäg” is a Turkic title of respect for a man (like the English “Mr.”). And the title “Tegin” is a Turkic equivalent of “Ispahsalar”, a military commander or general. Families did inherit the titles which later became family names, as Tegin/Tekin is also a Turkic surname. There is not enough information to reconstruct the identity of the latter Ispahsalar, as to whether he was the same person as the previous Ispahsalar, but he had a Christian name “Johanan”. A hybrid of Syriac, Turkic and Persian terms was typical among these communities made up different ethnic and linguistic groups.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Death Year</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Remark</b>
Kustans	1262	Mother of Ispahsalar	No. 5
Samen Kustans	1298	Daughter of Ispahsalar	
Tap Tirim Kustans	1313	Daughter of Ispahsalar	No. 71
Febrona Kustans	1325		No. 104
Euphronia Kustans	not given		No. 310
Kuzwar Khatun Kustans	not given	Khatun, wife of a prestigious man	Turkic title. No. 312
Johanan Tegin Beg	Not known	Ispahsalar	No. 129
Mirza	1339	Wife of Johanan Tegin Beg, the Ispahsalar	No. 129

There were also a priestly family with the Syriac name Denha and Turkic families such as, Ascha (14<sup>th</sup> c.), Arslan and Tegin which were well represented from the tombstones in these cemeteries.<sup>62</sup> Priests tend to have biblical names as well, such as Israel Zacharia. One of the women in the Arslan family of the 14<sup>th</sup> century had the Turkic aristocratic title “Khatun”, wife of Arslan.<sup>63</sup>

### 3.3. The Christian Community

The two medieval villages in the Chuy Valley already demonstrated an ethnic diversity among their Christian population. Christians of Turkic, Syriac, Persian, Armenian, Greek, Arab, Chinese, Mongols and Uighur heritage are well represented here. The names and the languages used for these inscriptions reveal

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 37, No. 193.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. the numbers of the tome stones listed in CHWOLSON 1897. Denha: Nos. 45, 61, 77; Ascha: 46, 51, 86, 134; Arslan: 93, 107, 132; and Tegin: 80, 81, 103.

<sup>63</sup> CHWOLSON 1897, No. 93. Arslan, meaning “lion” was a large Turkic clan in Central Asia.



that the majority of these Christians were of Turkic origin and there were even aristocratic Turkic families with Khatun as their women's title. Several families had pure Syriac names and their family members tended to be priests, teachers of the church, such as the Sauma and Denha families. Of course, the tombstones were inscribed in Syriac. It is usually the priests and teachers who knew Syriac. There is a high possibility that they were originally people of the Syriac heritage from Mesopotamia. Other Semitic names such as 'oſ<sup>c</sup>na<sup>64</sup> (as Hosanna in Greek), Barshaba,<sup>65</sup> etc. all suggest that Syriac families were among them. Actually, there was a funeral inscription from Issyk Kul, which stated the deceased was a "Syrian/Syrer".<sup>66</sup> They could be immigrants from Persia, as we know they were Syriac-speaking people in Sasanian Persia. Priests were also sent by the Church of the East as missionaries or to minister the Christian communities in the East. Some of the deceased bore also Persian and Greek names and the most prominent family with Persian origin was the Ispahsalar family. Interestingly enough, there was one Chinese woman whose name was inscribed as "Terim the Chinese" who died in 1286, ܬܪܝܡ ܬܝܚܝܢܐ.<sup>67</sup> A priest named Benus Uighur ܒܢܘܫ ܘܝܓܘܪ ܒܢܘܫ ܘܒܢܘܫ could be of Uighur origin?<sup>68</sup> A Mongol believer was called "Tata the Mongol believer" ܬܬܐ ܬܝܚܝܢܐ ܬܝܚܝܢܐ.<sup>69</sup> The most mysterious and a bigger tombstone belonged to an Armenian bishop (†AD 1325) named Johanan and was inscribed in both Armenian and Syriac.<sup>70</sup> However, there was no other information on the existence of an Armenian church community and the function of this bishop there, although the 14<sup>th</sup>-century Catalan Atlas mapped an Armenian monastery on the shore of the Issyk Kul lake. How this Bishop Johanan landed and died in the Chuy Valley is still a mystery to us.

The Christian communities in the district of these two villages were led by a country bishop Mar Johanan Sauma. Two inscriptions seem to suggest that he married twice, as the first inscription names Sauma Kustans who died in 1298 as the wife of the Chorepiscopus. Chorepiscopus Johanan's second wife(-to-be) died unfortunately shortly before or after the wedding, as her epitaph states: In the year 1618 (AD1310), the year of the sheep, this is the grave of Julia, the delightful maiden and the bride of Chorepiscopus Johanan. ܬܘܠܝܐ ܬܝܚܝܢܐ ܝܘܠܝܐ ܬܝܚܝܢܐ ܬܝܚܝܢܐ ܬܝܚܝܢܐ.<sup>71</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 39, No. 207: ܠܘܫܢܐ as in Greek Hosanna meaning "save now".

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 41, No. 227: ܒܪܫܒܐ Barshaba/Baršaba very typical Syriac name. The inscription is for Nestori, son of the exegetist Barshaba.

<sup>66</sup> See Klein 2006, 410.

<sup>67</sup> CHWOLSON 1897, 11, No.24.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 24, No. 97.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 47, No. 268.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., No. 100. ܝܘܗܢܐܢ ܒܝܫܘܦ ܝܘܗܢܐܢ ܒܝܫܘܦ ܝܘܗܢܐܢ. This is the tomb of Johanan, bishop of Armenia.

<sup>71</sup> CHWOLSON 1886, 13-14. No. 7.

Unfortunately, the Christian communities in these villages were heavily devastated if not wiped out by the Black Death which hit them strongly between 1338 and 1339. Several of the funeral inscriptions clearly indicated that the deceased died of the Plague, and another hundred or so tombstones dated to the same period without mentioning the cause of death. Such a large number of death cases would have given the epitaph inscribers less time to engrave “died of the Plague” on the stones. Over a hundred short funeral inscriptions of the epidemic years have been found. It seems that the Plague was still rampant in 1341 because at least 16 inhabitants died in that year.<sup>72</sup>

#### 4. Concluding Remark

Why were there so many distinguished families and personalities and diverse ethnic groups living in such small villages in the Chuy Valley? One of the reasons might be that these two villages lie in the suburban areas of Suyab and Burana, both being the staging posts of the Silk Road. Suyab was the Chinese protectorate during the Tang Dynasty, whereas Burana was the place where Balasagung, the capital of the Kara Khanid Khanate (10<sup>th</sup> c.) was located, which was later conquered by the Kara Khitai in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Balasagung was founded by the Sogdians who used to build commercial colonies along the Silk Road. It was well connected to both Talas in the West, another city on the Silk Road, and Almaliq in the East. Therefore, wealthy families may have chosen to live in the suburban areas of the main commercial cities. In Almaliq near Hocheng in today’s Chinese Xinjiang, which was part of the Chagatai Khanate in the Mongol period, at least 22 Syriac tombstones similar to the ones found in the Chuy Valley were also unearthed.

The Chuy Valley and Zhetysu were well connected through the Silk Road to China in the East and Samarkand in the West. Zhetysu was the corridor between Persia and China. Samarkand served as the Christian centre of the Church of the East beyond the Oxus River. The Church of the East had a Metropolitan in Samarkand at least in the 9<sup>th</sup> cent when Patriarch Theodosius I (AD 853-858) placed it the last of the external provinces.<sup>73</sup> Samarkand had a Metropolitan in 1046.<sup>74</sup> Bar Hebraeus (AD 1226-1286) in his *Chronicon Syriacum* mentioned the Metropolitan of Samarkand during an event in AH 48/1060.<sup>75</sup>

Patriarch Elias founded the Metropolitanate of Kashgar even after the conquest of Islam in the Karakhanate. Among the tombstones in the Chuy Valley, there

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>73</sup> A. MAI 1838, 146 (Latin) & 308 (Syriac).

<sup>74</sup> BARTHOLD 1901, 51. Footnote 2. Abulfarag brought a letter written in 1046 from the Metropolitan of Samarkand to the Catholics.

<sup>75</sup> BEDJAN ed. 1890. 228-229.

was also a woman or a patron called Qaiyāmtā<sup>76</sup> from Karshgar كاشغر, who died in 1341. The archbishop there had the title of “Metropolitan of Kashgar and Navekat”. Kashgar was also part of the Karakhanate and later the Chatagtai Khanate during the Mongol period whereas Navekat is located in the southern part of Zhetysu/Semirejchie.<sup>77</sup>

From the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Christianity reached the Chuy Valley and Zhetysu region. The size of the Christian communities was not big enough to be named a bishopric, as the highest clergyman was a chorepiscopos, a country bishop. The funeral inscriptions reveal some of the characteristics of the social and ecclesiastical structures in these Christian villages as described above. Christianity spread there not only through family kinship but also through the preaching of the Gospel by missionaries. Among hundreds of the funeral inscriptions, there is one special and distinctive one which describes a certain exegetist and preacher named Shliha who died in 1316, the year when the solar eclipses كسوف happened and the darkness fell. In contrast to the natural darkness, the inscription describes that Shliha enlightened all the little monasteries كنيستين with light and his raised (preaching) voice sounded like a trumpet.<sup>78</sup> This inscription tells that there were not only missionary activities but also little monasteries in the area. In recent years archaeologists from Kyrgyzstan and Japan also confirmed that a large church complex – very likely a monastery site– in the northern part of Ak Beshim has been excavated.<sup>79</sup>

Central Asia served as a buffer zone or a refuge between China and Persia. It was the front door for Christians and other religious adherents in Persia to move eastward when things were not favorable and the backdoor for Christians in China when the political situation became hostile. The history of Central Asia saw the interactions among peoples of nomadic or sedentary lifestyles, and confrontations between empires, small and large. It was the meeting point of civilisations and religions such as Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Syriac Christianity, Shamanism and Islam. The Chuy Valley and Zhetysu Christian tombstone inscriptions are testimonies of such diversity.

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<sup>76</sup> CHWOLSON 1897, 39, No. 211.

<sup>77</sup> BARTHOLD 1956, 105-106.

<sup>78</sup> CHWOLSON 1886, 14-15, No. 8. Attached photo No. 4.

<sup>79</sup> KOLCHENCO 2017, 20.

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# SYRIAC FRAGMENTS FROM TURFAN AT RYUKOKU UNIVERSITY, KYOTO

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## Introduction

The large number of fragmentary Christian documents discovered in the Turfan area are of central importance for the study of the history of Christianity in Central Asia and China. The largest number of these fragments are now in Berlin.<sup>2</sup> Besides the institutions in Berlin, the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg is home to three sets of fragments of Syriac liturgical texts from Turfan,<sup>3</sup> one Syriac fragment from the Berlin Turfan collection has recently resurfaced in the State Hermitage,<sup>4</sup> and the news has just reached us as we go to press of the discovery of a large quantity of the same kind of material in excavations conducted at the monastery site at Bulayīq/Xipang 西旁 in the autumn of 2021.<sup>5</sup> In addition to these, there are several Christian items from the Turfan area among the objects brought back to

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<sup>1</sup> The present paper is a revised version of a paper published earlier in Japanese (TAKAHASHI 2017). I am grateful to Dr. Koichi Kitsudo and the Research Institute for Buddhist Culture, Ryukoku University, for giving me the opportunity to study the Syriac fragments described in this paper. I would also like to thank the participants of the *Jingjiao* conference at Almaty in 2019 for their comments, Erica Hunter in particular for taking the time on that occasion to sit down with me to examine anew the images of the three fragments, and Mark Dickens for the correspondence in which he has provided me with many helpful suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> See HUNTER & DICKENS 2014; SIMS-WILLIAMS 2012; and ZIEME 2015, 41-146, respectively, on the Syriac fragments, the Sogdian and Persian fragments in Syriac script, and the Christian fragments in Old Uyghur (in Syriac and Uyghur scripts).

<sup>3</sup> Syr. 14 (1 leaf, brought back by Krotkov; see PIGULEVSKAJA 1935-36, 31-39; EAD. 1940, 224f., 233f., Таблица III, фиг. 2; EAD. 1960, 154-156 [no. LVII]); Syr. 40 (1 leaf, brought back by Malov in 1914); Serindica [SI] 5844 (approx. 97 fragments, 18 leaves, Krotkov; see MEŠČERSKAJA 1996; EAD. 1998). See further SMELOVA 2015, 221f.

<sup>4</sup> ВДсэ-524, olim [T] D 134/D II 134 (from “Dakianus-shahri”/Qocho; prayer-amulet), see PCHLIN-RASCHMANN 2016, 14f.; DICKENS & SMELOVA 2021.

<sup>5</sup> LIU, WANG & WANG 2021.



Japan by the expeditions led or financed by Count Kōzui Ōtani 大谷光瑞 (1876-1948) in the period 1902-1914 and now housed at Ryukoku University in Kyoto. These items include three fragments of Syriac manuscripts, and it is with these fragments that this paper is concerned.<sup>6</sup>

The majority of the Berlin Turfan fragments come from the monastery site at Bulayīq, but some of them are known to have been discovered at other sites in the Turfan area.<sup>7</sup> Out of the pieces in St. Petersburg, one item (Syr. 14) is reported to be from Astana. There appear unfortunately to be no records of the exact locations where the three fragments now in Kyoto were discovered; neither do we know whether the three fragments come from the same site. Since, however, the Otani expeditions never investigated the site at Bulayīq, we may be fairly certain, at least, that they are from one of the other sites in the Turfan area.

As with the other Christian documents from the Turfan area (with the exception of MIK III 45 which has been carbon dated to the period 771-884 AD),<sup>8</sup> there is no internal or external evidence that allows us to give a secure date for the three fragments, but paleographical considerations suggest that they belong to a relatively late stage within the overall period of the ninth to the fourteenth century to which the Turfan fragments are generally assigned.<sup>9</sup> One such consideration is the absence of the “three-stroke alaph”,<sup>10</sup> the hallmark of the Estrangelā script, in fragments no. 2022 (figs. 3, 4 & 5) and no. 6221 (figs. 6 & 7).<sup>11</sup> In no. 1789 (figs.

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<sup>6</sup> Besides the three Syriac fragments, the Christian items in the collection at Ryukoku University include a manuscript fragment in Old Uyghur (no. 2234; see ZIEME 2020), and a fragment in Sogdian (no. 2497; see KUDARA et al. 1997, text 解説編 p. 76f., plates 図版編 p. 18; YOSHIDA 2017a; cf. n. 47 below). Another possibly Christian item collected by the Otani expedition is a painting now at the National Museum of Korea, Seoul (see YOSHIDA 2015, 161, n. 24; PARRY 2016; and further literature cited in TAKAHASHI 2020, 56, n. 97)

<sup>7</sup> See HUNTER & DICKENS 2014, ii, 1.

<sup>8</sup> HUNTER 2016, 90, 100.

<sup>9</sup> On the paleographical features of the Syriac documents from Turfan in general, see DICKENS 2013, 11; HUNTER & DICKENS 2014, 12, 16; on those of the fragments SyrHT 41, 42, 43, dated by Hunter to the mid-thirteenth century, HUNTER 2012a, 343; and on those of the Syriac fragments from Khara-Khoto now in St. Petersburg, SMELOVA 2015, 224-230.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. HUNTER & DICKENS 2014, 12.

<sup>11</sup> In fragment 2022, recto A, l. 3, there is a peculiarly shaped final *alaph* with its vertical stroke leaning heavily to the right, but this too cannot be classified as a “three-stroke alaph”.

1 & 2) too, the final *ālap* appears in its vertical, single-stroke form, although the three-stroke *ālap* is used at the beginnings of words.

If the fragments are to be classified by their script into the older Eṣṣrangēlā type or the later cursive type, fragments no. 2022 and no. 6221 can safely be classified as belonging to the later cursive type. In no. 2022, we find a mixture of the older, more angular forms of *dālat* and *rēš* with the same letters in the newer, rounded forms, and the *mīm*, though not the “open” Eṣṣrangēlā *mīm*, retains a somewhat angular shape. In no. 6221, all these three letters, where visible, take a more rounded form, giving the script in this fragment a more cursive appearance.

The script of no. 1789, apparently by a less trained hand, is more difficult to place. Besides the mixed forms of the *ālap* mentioned above, the *dālat* and *rēš* here generally retain their angular form, but they appear in more rounded forms in lines 4-6 of the verso. The *mīm* often has an unusual diamond shape,<sup>12</sup> is generally angular, and comes close to being an Eṣṣrangēlā-type *mīm*. At the same time, lines 5, 6 and 10 of the recto of this fragment exhibit the *taw-ālap* ligature, which is a typical feature of the later East Syrian script. A Syriac manuscript from Turfan which, in addition being a text of the same genre (see below), resembles our fragment in that it uses the *taw-ālap* ligature as well as a mixture of three-stroke and single-stroke *ālap*'s is State Hermitage ВДсэ-524.<sup>13</sup> The earliest securely dated manuscripts exhibiting such ligatures belong to the middle of the thirteenth century, and this fact has been used as an argument for dating one of the Syriac fragments from Dunhuang to the 13th-14th century.<sup>14</sup> In considering the dates of

<sup>12</sup> A similarly shaped *mīm* occurs, for example, also in SyrHT 264.

<sup>13</sup> See the photographs in PCHÉLIN-RASCHMANN 2016, 14f.; DICKENS & SMELOVA 2021, 116-119; cf. *ibid.* 113.

<sup>14</sup> See KLEIN & TUBACH 1994, 11f., 466 (with reference to MS Berlin, Petermann I.9, dated 1259/60 AD; cf. HATCH 1946, 225); and KAUFHOLD 1996, 59, n. 50 (manuscript dated 1243 AD; cf. PIGULEVSKAJA 1960, 89 [no. XXII]). Although the majority of the Syriac fragments from Turfan do not have the ligatured *-t*, a significant minority do, including SyrHT 1, 2 and 360, which were dated by Maróth, respectively, to the 9th-10th c., 10th c. and 10th-11th c. (MARÓTH 1984, 11; *id.* 1985, 283; *id.* 1991, 86), as well as SyrHT 76 (mixed with non-ligatured *-t*), 94, 128, 221 (mixed), 245, 255, 264, 274, 285, 393, n415, 420. The ligature is also found in Syriac and Syriac-script material from elsewhere in Central Asia and China, including the Beijing-Taipei manuscript and the manuscripts from Khara-Khoto, as well as on the gravestones from

manuscripts with these ligatures, we need to distinguish between the more carefully written manuscripts, such as the liturgical manuscripts intended for communal use (which are more likely to be accompanied by dated colophons and also to have been preserved by being stored in ecclesiastical libraries), and less carefully written manuscripts intended for non-ecclesiastical and private use.<sup>15</sup> The likelihood is that the *taw-ālap* ligature began to be used earlier in the latter category of manuscripts, so that the occurrence of the ligature in fragment no. 1789 need not necessarily mean that it should be dated to the thirteenth century or later, but it does suggest at least a relatively late date.

In the transcription below, italics indicate uncertain readings. Hyphens are used where traces of letters are visible, but the letters cannot be deciphered, with the number of hyphens indicating the approximate number of letters. Blank spaces indicate places where the paper has been worn to the extent that not even the trace of ink is now visible. Square brackets are used where the paper itself is lost. Dots above the letters (e.g. ‘r̄’) indicate the presence of the plural sign (*syāmē*).

### 1. Fragment Ot Ry 1789 [10 x 5 cm] (Figures 1 & 2)

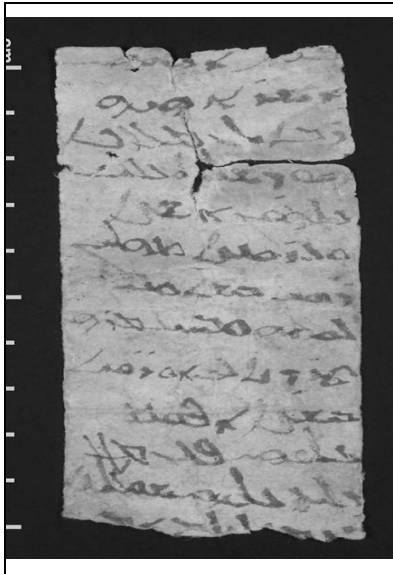
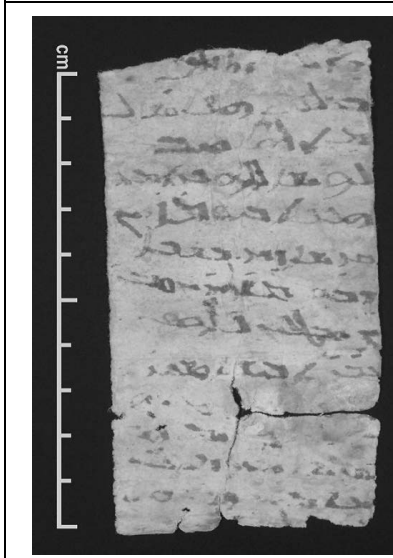
Thirteen lines of text are left on both the recto and verso of the fragment. The lines run in different directions on the two sides. As already mentioned, the text seems to have been written by an untrained hand and shows variation in the sizes of the letters and the widths of the strokes. The diacritical points appear, rather

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the Jetisu/Jeti-Suu (Semireč'e) region: see SAEKI 1935, 751-790; ID. 1937, 315-333; TAYLOR 1941, cf. TAKAHASHI 2020, 54f. (on the Beijing-Taipei manuscript); PIGULEVSKAJA 1940, Таблица I (Syr. 16 (LXX), horizontal text, l. 6), Таблица II (Syr. 15 (LXXI) vertical text, l. 6), Таблица III, фиг. 1 (Syr. 17 verso (LXXII), l. 7; text in Turkic, ligature in loanword from Syriac); SMELOVA 2015, 227 (reporting the presence of the ligature in Syr. 17 recto), 230 (Syr. 21b, vertical text, l. 7), 231 (Syr. 21c, right, ll. 6, 18, 25), YOSHIDA & CHIMEDDORJI 2009, colour plates, 9th page (H 彩 101, ll. 13, 14, 23, 29, 33, 38, 44, 46, 47); JUMAGULOV 2011, 109, 147 (1336?), 214 (1285/6), 228 (1286/7), 230, 262 (1338), 296 (1337/8), 399, 401 (1301), 413 (1339), etc.; DESREUMAUX 2015, 247 (1301/2), 248 (1337/8), 252 (1264); NIU 2008, 64 (Almaliq, photograph unclear).

<sup>15</sup> Of the Berlin Turfan fragments mentioned in the preceding note, the only one that certainly belongs to a liturgical manuscript is SyrHT 245 (Ḥudrā Z). SyrHT 76 and 128 may also be liturgical. The rest can be classified as follows: SyrHT 1: medicine (in addition to the references given in HUNTER & DICKENS 2014, see now LIN 2020a); SyrHT 2: letter; SyrHT 94: theological (polemic); SyrHT 221: prayer book, for personal use?; SyrHT 255, n 415, n 420: philosophy (Aristotle, LIN 2021a); SyrHT 264: calendrical; SyrHT 274: amulet; SyrHT 360: hagiography (LIN 2020b; EAD. 2021b).

than as rounded points, as short horizontal lines tilted slightly upwards to the right, with their length matching the width of the thicker strokes (i.e. the breadth of the nib of the calamus). The writing comes close to the edge of the page on the left and right, but we may assume that no letters are lost there since the text connects between the lines in most cases.

	<p>Fig. 1. Or Ry 1789 Recto</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. bšm 'hyh</li> <li>2. 'šr 'hyh</li> <li>3. rb'yl ml'k'</li> <li>4. hw dšl w'lkky</li> <li>5. klhwn 'št'</li> <li>6. w'rw't' w'hlyn</li> <li>7. rwh' byš' wly--</li> <li>8. lwhw wbhlymrh</li> <li>9. ṭrdn' lky' w rwh'</li> <li>10. byšt' 'pwll</li> <li>11. 'lwhy pln mṭl</li> <li>12. dly 'lwhy šwltñ</li> <li>13. -- m-l-l ---</li> </ol>
	<p>Fig. 2. Or Ry 1789 Verso</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. d'y- -tnš-</li> <li>2. b'lm' hn' wš'l</li> <li>3. mn 'lh' wyb</li> <li>4. lh š'lth kd 'mr</li> <li>5. hkn' bywm' ryn</li> <li>6. qdyš' dḥdbšb'</li> <li>7. dbh mštryn w 'b-</li> <li>8. yn wbtlyn klhwn</li> <li>9. 'bd' byš' wškyr-</li> <li>10. s--' m---</li> <li>11. - -- --</li> <li>12. ---- m-l-</li> <li>13. -' ---- w y</li> </ol>

Recto: Translation

[1-2] In the name of *Ehyeh ašer ehyeh*, [3] <and?> the angel *rb ʿyl* [4] who is the head of the angels (?), [5] all fevers [6] and shivers, and these [7] evil and accursed (?) spirits [8] ... and by the power of his lord [9-10] I drive you away, O evil spirit, do not fall (?) [11] upon so-and-so, because [12] I have authority over him ...

Verso: Translation

[1] ... as he was celebrated [2] in this world, and he requested [3] of God, and He granted [4] him his request, saying [5-6] thus, “On the holy day of Sunday [7] on which [8-9] all evil, hideous and hateful deeds (?) [7-8] are dissolved, pass away and are annulled ...”

The text here is that of a “prayer-amulet”. The text on the side registered today as the “verso” is the same as that of the “Anathema of Mar Cyprian” found in SyrHT 102, and the part that is legible here (ll. 1-9) corresponds to the text in ll. 3-6 on the recto of that fragment.<sup>16</sup>

Amulets of this kind have a long history in the Middle East and, despite the prohibition of their use by ecclesiastical authorities,<sup>17</sup> Syriac-rite Christians, especially the members of the Church of the East, have continued to use them up until the present day as a part of their folk-medical tradition.<sup>18</sup> The majority of the Syriac prayer-amulets we know, including those edited by Gollancz over a century ago, come from Kurdistan and are of recent date, but there is a continuity in the content and structure of the texts of these amulets going back to the first millennium, so that these late specimens too are of help to us in deciphering and understanding the content of our fragment.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See HUNTER 2017, 86 .

<sup>17</sup> As an example of the criticism of such amulets in Syriac from the fifth century, see MORIGGI 2016; on the treatment of such practices more generally in early Christianity, SANZO 2019.

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, HUNTER 2009; AL-JELOO 2012 .

<sup>19</sup> Unlike the texts belonging to other genres of the Syriac literary tradition, prayer-amulets were not usually included in ecclesiastical library collections, and many specimens no doubt remain today in private possession (see AL-JELOO 2012). For a preliminary list of the Syriac prayer-amulets held by public libraries throughout the world, see ČAMURLIEVA 2012, 161f.; on two specimens in Tbilisi which are not registered there, see SCHMIDT 2017 (nos. 2 and 4). More generally on amulets and germane materials in Syriac, including those from the earlier period,

From Central Asia/Western China, we have several specimens of such prayer-amulets in the Berlin Turfan collection,<sup>20</sup> as well as among the Syriac manuscripts from Khara-Khoto (Qaraqota) now in St. Petersburg and Hohhot (Kökeqota).<sup>21</sup> It seems quite likely also that the remarkable Chinese Manichaean “Prayer of St. George” (*Jisizhou* 吉思咒) from Xiapu, with its brief account of the saint’s life and his final vows for the protection of his devotees, is to be associated with this kind of practice.<sup>22</sup>

The prayer-amulets known to us come both in codex form and on single sheets of paper,<sup>23</sup> the latter taking the form either of a large sheet of paper that was folded up,<sup>24</sup> or of a long strip that was either folded or rolled to make them portable.<sup>25</sup> Our fragment, with its vertically elongated shape,<sup>26</sup> the traces of a fold

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see the literature cited in DICKENS & SMELOVA 2021, 121f., along with the studies collected together in MORIGGI & BHAYRO 2021.

<sup>20</sup> HUNTER 2012b, 85-88; EAD. 2013; EAD. 2017, 82-89; HUNTER & DICKENS 2014, 453; DICKENS & SMELOVA 2021. On the Syriac-script Sogdian fragment E8 [C49] as a part of such an amulet, see SIMS-WILLIAMS 2012, 50; ID. 2020.

<sup>21</sup> SMELOVA 2015, 227f. (Syr. 17 recto); MUTO 2008; ID. 2016 (H 彩 101).

<sup>22</sup> On *Jisizhou*, see LIN 2014, 471-472 (*Moni Guangfo* 摩尼光佛, ll. 314-333); ID. 2015; MA 2016; WANG & LIN 2018.

<sup>23</sup> The manuscripts in codex form usually contain a number of different prayers and are assumed to have been used as exemplars from which the texts actually used as amulets were copied, but it is reported that there were cases where such codices were used in practice as amulets, for example, by being placed under a pillow (see LYAVDANSKY 2011, 15).

<sup>24</sup> An example of this is the amulet from Khara-Khoto edited by Muto. See also HUNTER 2017, 83 (SyrHT 99).

<sup>25</sup> These rolls could be of considerable length. The remaining part of State Hermitage ВДсэ-524 is reported to measure 7 cm by 89.5 cm (DICKENS & SMELOVA 2021, 112). Out of the pieces today in the Matenadaran in Erevan, no. 72a is reported to measure 8 cm by 258 cm, and no. 72b 8 cm by 218 cm, while no. 9-90, now incomplete, measures 5.50 cm by 115.8 cm (MEŠČERSKAJA 1981, 103f.; SCHMIDT & ABOUSAMRA 2014, 146). Similarly, the length of the piece whose photograph is given at AL-JELOO 2012, 490 easily exceeds the height of the male person holding it.

<sup>26</sup> “Vertically”, that is, if we assume that Syriac texts were being read horizontally by the Christians in Central Asia and China. Unlike with materials in Sogdian and Uyghur scripts (cf. YOSHIDA 2013, on vertical writing of Sogdian as early as 5th c.; but note also HAMILTON 1986, 1; ERDAL 2004, 41, on Old Uyghur written horizontally in 9th/10th c.), the available evidence, such as the Turfan fragments in which the joints between the pages are preserved (e.g. MIK III 45, SyrHT 28, 42-43, 45-46, 48, 56-58, 71-72, 78, 80-82, 90-95, 113, 245), suggests that texts in Syriac script continued to be read horizontally, at least on paper, but it is worth remembering that some of the Syriac-script inscriptions near Urgut are written vertically on the rock face (see DICKENS 2017), and that almost all the known Syriac-script inscriptions from areas further east, in those

at line 10 (of the recto), and with the writing going in different directions on the recto and verso sides, is likely to have been a part of a long strip of paper like State Hermitage BДсэ-524 that was actually used as an amulet.<sup>27</sup>

Many of the prayer-amulets known to us are associated with particular saints. The text of the prayer typically begins with the accounts of the miracles performed by the saint and ends with the formulas for driving away the evil spirits. If, therefore, the texts on the recto and verso sides of our fragment belong to the same prayer, it is likely that the text on the verso belongs to the first half, and that on the recto to the second half.

As will emerge from the notes below, the text in our fragment contains a large number of what must be judged to be miswritten words, suggesting that the copyist had, at best, an imperfect knowledge of Syriac. In an actual amulet, the words “so and so” (*plān*) that appears here in recto, line 11, needs to be replaced by the name of the person the amulet is intended to protect. It seems our copyist was not even aware of this practice.<sup>28</sup>

Recto, ll. 1-2: “*ehyeh ašer ehyeh*”: The transcription of the Hebrew divine name “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14) occurs regularly in Syriac prayer-amulets. Whereas in the texts edited by Gollancz the name occurs in a form without the *ālap* of the second *ehyeh* (*’hyh ’šrhyh*, *’hyh ’šr hyh*), the original form is retained here, as it is also in the amulet from Khara-Khoto edited by Muto (l.

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cases where there is a way of determining the direction of writing, are written vertically (e.g. the Xi’an Stele, the two Syriac inscriptions at Ulaan Tolgoi, the Syro-Turkic epitaphs from Quanzhou and Yangzhou, the two longer epitaphs from Olan Süme [NIU 2008, 67-75, nos. 1-2], the inscriptions in the White Pagoda near Hohhot and in the Yulin Grottoes, and the Psalm quotation on the cross at Fangshan and on the epitaph from Songzhou in Ulayaṅqada/Chifeng).

<sup>27</sup> BДсэ-524, however, is written only on one side. Among the prayer-amulets from Turfan now in Berlin, SyrHT 99 and n364 show fold marks, while in SyrHT 99 and in n364-365 the writing runs in opposite directions on the recto and verso faces (HUNTER & DICKENS 2014, 116, 399-401).

<sup>28</sup> On the scribal errors in BДсэ-524, see DICKENS & SMELOVA 2021, 141f. In that manuscript, however, the person for whom the amulet was written (Ögünč) is actually named. Further more systematic investigation will be needed to determine whether the orthographical errors in such instances as these are to be attributed to simple (visual) misreading of the exemplar by copyists with deficient knowledge of Syriac, or to the influence of oral transmission and the interference of the copyist’s native language (cf. *ibid.* 142; cf. also n. 33 below).

30) and in State Hermitage ВДсэ-524 (l. 22).<sup>29</sup> In the texts edited by Gollancz, this name is usually followed by other divine names, such as “Elshaddai”, “Adonai” and “Lord of Hosts (Sabaoth)”. Those names are absent both here and in the piece from Khara-Khoto, while ВДсэ-524 has “Adonai”.<sup>30</sup> The letters preceding the divine name are most probably to be read as *bšm* (*b-šem*, “in the name [of]”).<sup>31</sup>

ll. 3-4: “the angel *rb`yl* who is the head of the angels (?)” (*rb`yl ml`k` / hw dšl w`llky*): The rare angelic name “Rabiel” (*rbyl*) occurs in a Syriac amulet in MS BnF syriacque 400/1, but only as the name of one of several dozen angels invoked there.<sup>32</sup> Of the two better known angels with whose names the cluster of letters here has some resemblance, Raphael (written *rp`yl* or, more commonly, *rwp`yl* in Syriac)<sup>33</sup> does not appear in any of the amulets edited by Gollancz or any, it seems, of the known Christian texts from Turfan.<sup>34</sup> Gabriel (*gbr`yl*), on the other hand, is the angel most frequently invoked in the amulets edited by Gollancz and appears also in the amulet from Khara-Khoto (l. 31, just

<sup>29</sup> MUTO 2008, 236; ID. 2016, 148f.; DICKENS & SMELOVA 2021, 114, 117; GOLLAN CZ 1912, 3 (A§5, l. 11), 5 (§7, l. 13), 6 (§8, l. 5), 8 (§10, ll. 1-2), 10 (§13, l. 12), 22 (§36, ll. 1-2), 32 (§53, l. 6), 38 (B§4/9, l. 6), 77 (C§1, l. 10), 79 (§3, l. 3), 83 (§10, l. 10); HAZARD 1893, 284 (l. 21; MS Harvard, Syr. 159; for further occurrences in manuscripts at Harvard, see GOSHEN-GOTTSTEIN 1979, 103); HUNTER 1993, 251 (MS Oxford, Syr. g. 3 (R)); SCHMIDT & ABOUSAMRA 2014, 152f. (ll. 106, 127-128).

<sup>30</sup> Among the Syriac apotropaic material from an earlier period, one of the magic bowls in the Martin Bodmer Library has the names “Adonay, Šebaot, El Šadday” (MORIGGI 2014, 97, no. 18, 8), and the leather amulet published by Naveh has the words “mighty and awful God Adonai Sabaoth the Lord (*lh`gnbr`wdh`yl`dwny šb`wty mry`*)” (NAVEH 1997, 34, l. 7f.), but “*ehyeh ašer ehyeh*” occurs in neither of them.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. DICKENS & SMELOVA 2021, 114 (ВДсэ-524, l. 21); GOLLAN CZ 1912, 3, 8, 22, 32, 38, 77, 79, 83 (*bšm`hyh`šrhyh*; also *ibid.*, 6, *šm`hyh`šrhyh*).

<sup>32</sup> GIGNOUX 1987, 10 (l. 9), 20. Gignoux identifies the name with Hebrew *rbwyl* (cf. SCHWAB 1897, 243 [355]).

<sup>33</sup> If the angel intended here was Raphael, the substitution of *p* (pronounced [f] or [φ]) by *b* could perhaps be linked to the absence of /f/ in the native phonemic inventory of Turkic and the lack of distinction between *p* and *b* in Uyghur script (with thanks to Mark Dickens for this suggestion; cf. ERDAL 2004, 63-67; cf. also n. 28 above).

<sup>34</sup> See the indices of names in the catalogues by HUNTER & DICKENS 2014, 469-475; SIMS-WILLIAMS 2012, 230-237; ZIEME 2015, 181-192. For the occurrences of Raphael (*rwp`yl*, 嚙嚙逸嘍/盧縛逸) in a quartet of angels/deities with Gabriel, Michael and Sariel (Istrael) in Parthian, Middle Persian and Chinese Manichaean documents, see HENNING 1943, 54; DURKIN-MEISTERERNST 2004, 299; LIN 2014, 461, 462, 463, 468, 472, 475 (*Moni Guangfo*, ll. 91, 107f., 141, 261, 334, 399); MA 2015, 247-249; YOSHIDA 2017b, 251f.; cf. DICKENS 2021, 609.



after “*ehyeh ašer ehyeh*”) and in BДсэ-524 (l. 25, together with Michael, after “*ehyeh ašer ehyeh*” and “Adonai”), making it more likely, despite the more radical emendation required, that Gabriel is the angel who should have been invoked here. Especially if this the case, the letters *hw dšl w llky* are perhaps to be corrected to *hw drš ml'ky* (*haw d-rēš malakē*) or *hw rš ml'ky* (<*d*>-*hū rēš malakē*),<sup>35</sup> yielding the reading “who is the head of the angels”, an epithet used of Gabriel in at least two places in the texts edited by Gollancz.<sup>36</sup>

- ll. 5-6: “all fevers and shivers” (klhwn 'št' / w'rw't'): There is incongruence of gender and number here. Preceding two feminine nouns, *kōl* should have a feminine suffix, and following such a word, one would expect “fever” (*ešštā*) to be in the plural (i.e. *klhyn 'štw't', kōlhēn eššātawātā*). The following 'rw't' will be a corrupt form of 'rwy't' ('rāwītā, pl. 'rāwyātā, “shivering, fever”).
- ll. 6-7: “and these evil and accursed (?) spirits” (w'hlyn / rwḥ' byš' wly--): The letters that appear to read *w'hlyn* should probably be corrected to either *whlyn* (*w-hālēn*, “and these”) or *wklhyn* (*w-kōlhēn*, “and all”). Accompanying the feminine noun *rūḥā/rūḥē*, the adjective *byš'* should have the feminine form *byšt'* (sg. *bīštā*, pl. *bīšātā*). The last word in l. 7 is probably *lyt'* (*lītā/lītē*, “accursed”).
- l. 8: “? and by the power of his lord (lwhw wbḥylmrh): The cluster of letters *lwhw* is perhaps to be emended to 'lwhy ('law(hy)), “[relying?] upon it/him”. With *b-ḥayl māreh*, cf. BДсэ-524, l. 12f., *b-ḥaylā rabbā d-Māran Īšō' Mšīḥā māran w-alāhan* (“by the great power of Our Lord Jesus Christ, our lord and our God).
- l. 9: “I drive away” (*tāred-nā*): The verb *trad* “to drive away”, along with the commoner *esar* “to bind”, is regularly used as the verb denoting the action performed against evil spirits in prayer-amulets.<sup>37</sup>
- ll. 9-10: “[I drive] you [away], O evil spirit” (*lky 'w rḥ' byšt'*): There is a plural sign (*syāmē*) above the word *rḥ'*, but not above the accompanying adjective *byšt'*. Although the word I have read as *lky* (*lek*, “you [fem. sg.]”) is somewhat

<sup>35</sup> Confusion of the letters *dālat* and *rēš* is not so uncommon (cf. the comment on l. 5 of the verso of this fragment). The *lāmad* in *dšl* could have arisen from misconstruing an elongated tail of *šīm*. For an instance of *malakē* written with *yōd* instead of *ālap* at the end, see the following note.

<sup>36</sup> GOLLAN CZ 1912, 15 (A§20, l. 9, *Gabriel rēš malakē*), 81 (C§7, l. 3, *Gabriel rēšeh d-malakē*); cf. *ibid.*, 91 (C§27, l. 8), “that great angel, the head of the holy angels” (*hw m'lk' [lege ml'k'] rb' ršh d-m'ky [lege d-m'l'k'] qdyš'*), without explicit mention of the name “Gabriel”.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, GOLLAN CZ 1912, 7, 12, 31 (A§9, ll. 5-6, §16, ll. 12-13, §52, ll. 24-25). On the use of the participial construction in such performative utterances in Syriac, see ROGLAND 2001.

unclear, it is certainly not *lkyn* (*lkēn*, fem. pl.), so I take the “spirit” here to be in the singular.<sup>38</sup>

ll. 11-12: “do not fall (?) upon so-and-so” (‘*pwll* / ‘lwhy pln): I am unable to make sense of the word ‘*pwll*. A possible solution will be to read *l’ t’pwl* (*lā teppōl*, “do not fall”), by deleting the last *lāmad* of ‘*pwll*, emending the initial *ālap* to *taw*, and supplying the negative particle *l’* (*lā*) before it. That negative particle could have been omitted by haplography after the preceding *byšt’* due to the similarity of the letter forms *-t’* and *l’*. As a prohibition addressed to the grammatically feminine “evil spirit”, the verb should have the feminine form *t’plyn* (*tepplīn*), but incongruence of gender has been observed elsewhere in this text. Alternatively, we could construe *teppōl* as the third person feminine singular form of the imperfect (“may [the evil spirit] not fall ...”).

Verso, ll. 1-2: “as he was celebrated in this world” (*d’y-- -tnṣ- / b’l’-’ hn’*): The illegible letters can be supplied from SyrHT 102, recto, l. 3: *d-ayakan etnaṣṣaḥ b-’ālmā hānā*. (HUNTER 2017: 86; cf. also *ibid.*, 85, n.364-365, recto, ll. 3-4).

ll. 3: “and He granted” (*wyb*): The verb *yb* is written here omitting the unpronounced *hē*. SyrHT 102 (recto, l. 4) has the correct form *yhb* (*ya(h)b*).

l. 5: *ryn: lege “dyn” (dēn)*; cf. SyrHT 102, recto, l. 5.

ll. 5-6: “the holy day of Sunday” (*yawmā qaddīšā d-ḥadbšabbā*): The phrase is reminiscent of the so-called *Letter from Heaven*, in which God promises to protect those who keep the Sunday holy.<sup>39</sup>

ll. 7-8: “pass away” (*w’b- / yn [w-’ābrīn]*): The word is written over two lines, as happens frequently in amulets written on thin strips of paper.<sup>40</sup>

ll. 9: “deeds (?)” (*’bd’*): The word at the corresponding place in SyrHT 102 (recto, l. 6) is equally unclear and was read as *gabrē* (“men”) by Hunter. The initial

<sup>38</sup> On the similarly irregular use of the *syāmē* in B]C3-524, see DICKENS & SMELOVA 2021, 113.

<sup>39</sup> With the phrase here, cf. HALL 1889, 39, l.10, 40, l. 8, 41, ll. 14-15 (*yawmeh d-ḥad bšabbā qaddīšā*); *id.* 1893, 127, l. 2 (*yawmā dīl(y) qaddīšā d-ḥadbš[abbā]*), 129, l. 3 (*yawmā qaddīšā d-ḥadbšabbā*), 131, l. 3 (*yawmā d-ḥadbšabbā qaddīšā dīl(y)*). For God’s promise to protect those who keep the Sunday holy from diseases, see HALL 1893, 131, ll. 4-5. On the Oriental and Occidental traditions of the *Letter from Heaven*, see VAN ESBROEK 1989.

<sup>40</sup> For example, such word division occurs 22 times in 198 lines in one of the amulets at the Matenadaran (9-90), which is written on a strip with a reported width of 5.5 cm (see SCHMIDT & ABOUSAMRA 2014, 149-156).

letter could be either *gāmal* or *ē* in both fragments. In our fragment, there is a faint trace of a point below the third letter, indicating, if the diacritical point is being used correctly here (cf. n. 35 and the comment on l. 5 above), that the letter is to be read as *dālat* rather than *rēš*.<sup>41</sup>

- II. 9-10: “evil, hideous and hateful” (byš’ wškyr- / s--’): The last of the three adjectives (*sny’*, *snayyā*), barely legible in our fragment, can be restored with the help of SyrHT 102.
- I. 10: *m---*: If the agreement between the text in our fragment and that in SyrHT 102 continues, the word here may be *mrīmā* (“exalted”; cf. SyrHT 102, recto, l. 7).

## 2. Fragment Ot Ry 2022 (Figures 3, 4 & 5)

The fragment, with a height of approximately 10 cm, consists of two parts that are only just held together by the joint at the bottom, so that as it has been preserved and photographed, it has the following four faces.

Recto B   Recto A  
Verso A   Verso B

There are places where the shapes of the edges suggest at first sight that a joint could be made between Recto B and A, and between Verso A and B, but if the two parts A and B are joined there, the surviving joint at the bottom of the page will be out of place. Furthermore, if the two parts are joined in this way, the line on Recto A with the words “in his mercy”, probably with reference to God in the third person, will be followed immediately in the next line in Recto B where God appears to be addressed in the second person. It seems likely, therefore, that the two parts of the fragment belong to two different folios and the four parts of the fragment come from four different pages of the original manuscript.

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<sup>41</sup> On “evil deed” as a recurring phrase in Syriac/Aramaic magical literature, see DICKENS & SMELOVA 2021, 124 (cf. *ibid* 115, BДЦэ-524, l. 32). As a biblical passage where the verbs *eštrī* and *bar* are used with the noun *bādā*, see Acts 5:38: *hādē maḥšabtā w-hānā bādā meštrēn w-ābrīn*. As an instance in apocalyptic literature where abstract concepts are “dissolved” and “annulled”, see REININK 1993, textus, 21, ll. 9-10 (*Apocalypse of Pseudo-Methodius*, 10.2): *w-bāh meštrēn w-bāḥlīn kōl-rēš w-kōl-šulṭānā* (“through [the Kingdom of the Christians] every rule and every authority will be dissolved and annulled”).


There are traces of folds on the left of Recto B and on the right of Verso A, and there are also places where the shapes of the edges allow joints to be made between Verso B and Recto A and between Verso A and Recto B without compromising the position of the surviving joint. Assuming, therefore, that the four pages belong to a single sheet of paper folded in two, the original distribution of those pages will be as follows.

Original surface X: Verso B – Recto A

Original surface Y: Verso A – Recto B

This being the case, Verso A and Recto A must have formed two consecutive pages with Verso A preceding Recto A, and similarly Verso B and Recto B, with Verso B preceding. The order between “Verso A-Recto A” and “Verso B-Recto B” can be decided if we can determine the direction of the fold, but this seems impossible with the fragment in its present condition. With the loss of the other sheets which would have made up the original quire, it is also not possible to determine whether either of Recto A and Verso B or Recto B and Verso A formed consecutive pages. One further indication we have for the original order of pages is the heavy wear on Verso B, which has resulted in the almost complete loss of the text there. This suggests that Verso B was exposed to the elements for a certain period of time, while Recto B, being on the inside, was better protected. If this reflects the way the paper was folded in the original codex, the order of the four pages will be: Verso B, Recto B, Verso A, Recto A.

It is unclear how much paper is lost on the right-hand side of the recto pages of both A and B. On the left-hand side, the ends of the lines appear to be preserved in ll. 4-8 of Recto A and in ll. 1-7 of Recto B. The lower part of A and the whole of Verso B have been subjected to heavy wear, making it nearly impossible to decipher any parts of the text there. All that can be made out on Verso B are the probable traces of the letter *ē* at around line 3 and of *ālap* in the next line. In the following transcription, underlining indicates letters which are now faint and were probably originally written in red. Period (.) is used to indicate what appear to be punctuation marks.

<p>Fig. 3. Ot Ry 2022 Recto B</p> 	<p>1 [                    ] š- [     ]'</p> <p>2 [                    ] wkl m[     ]n</p> <p>3 [     ]ksy' ' - 'nk 'w šbyḥ'</p> <p>4 [     ]mrny' d-- --t' mšb</p> <p>5 [                    ]s. mš. b[     ] m--'</p> <p>6 [                    ]lk' [ ]--[ ]- -wl'</p> <p>7 [     ]š[                    ]' --'</p> <p>8 [                    ] -</p> <p>9 [                    ] -</p>
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Translation (Recto B):

[2] ... all ... [3] hidden (*kasyā?*) / your ... / O! / praiseworthy (*šbīḥā*) ... [4] of the Lord (*mārānāyā*) ... to be praised (*mšabbḥā?*) ... [7] ... earth (*ar'ā?*)

1. 3: The second letter of the word transcribed above as ' - 'nk is undecipherable. The two letters that follow could be any of the combinations *-ln-*, *l' -*, *- 'n-*. The final *-k* is likely to be the second personal pronominal suffix *-āk* (“you/your”).
1. 3: 'w could be either the interjection “O!” or the conjunction “or”. In the cluster transcribed as *šbyḥ'* (*šbīḥā*), it looks as if there is a word break where I read the letter *yōd*; I believe the narrow gap there is due to erasure of the ink.
1. 4: The *taw* in the ending *-t'* of the penultimate word of the line has an unusual shape with its vertical stroke leaning to the right in an arc. Similar, right-leaning *taws* occur frequently in the fragments of the manuscript called “Hudra H” by Hunter & Dickens.<sup>42</sup>
1. 4: “to be praised (*mšabbḥā?*)”: The letters *mšb* at the end of the line could be interpreted as *maššeb* (“causes [wind] to blow”). Alternatively, it could be *mšbh'* (*mšabbḥā*), or fem. *mšbḥt'* (*mšabbaḥtā*), written in an abbreviated form or running over two lines.

<sup>42</sup> See HUNTER & DICKENS 2014, 450f. The *-t'* at the end of *tešbōḥtā* in SyrHT 237 recto has a shape particularly close to the one here. Another similarly shaped letter is the *lāmad* whose upper stroke “culminates in [a] right-hand hook” (ibid., 166; cf. DICKENS 2013, 11), which occurs frequently in Psalter B and Hudrā D (see HUNTER & DICKENS 2014, 447, 449). Otherwise, however, the hand of the fragment here differs appreciably from the hands of the fragments in Hudrā D, Hudrā H and Psalter B.

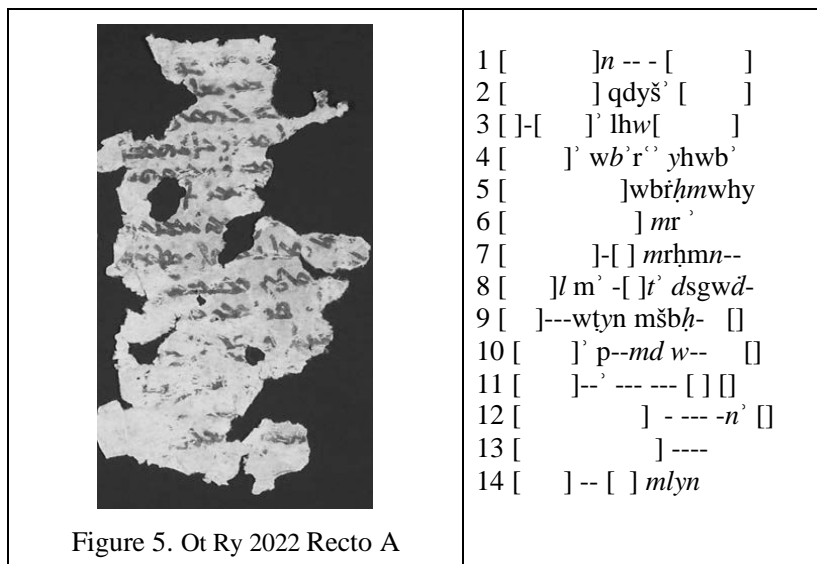
- 1. 6: - lk': perhaps *mlk'* (*malkā*, “king”).
- 1. 7: ' -: There appears to be a trace of the letter 'ē before the final *ālap*, suggesting the reading 'r' (ar'ā, “earth, land”).

<p>Fig. 4. Ot Ry 2022 Verso A</p> 	<p>1 [ ]-' -mr-[ ]</p> <p>2 [ ]-yn wš-[ ]</p> <p>3 [ ]-' m. h[ ] [ ]</p> <p>4 [ ] š l' -- -l-[ ]</p> <p>5 [ ] -l' [ ]</p> <p>6 [ ] [ ]-' -'d[ ]</p> <p>7 [ ] w m [ ]-[ ]</p> <p>8 [ ] - [ ] -k [ ]</p> <p>9 [ ] -' sg-' wm-šb[ ]</p> <p>10 [ ] [ ]hṭ' b. m. [ ]</p> <p>11 [ ] -y--l. - [ ]</p> <p>12 [ ] m-r'[ ]-- [ ]</p> <p>13 [ ] --' - [ ]</p> <p>14 [ ] m--- [ ]</p> <p>15 [ ] -- [ ] -[ ]</p> <p>16 [ ] h -- -- [ ]</p>
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Translation (Verso A):

[9] ... many (?) / consider/calculate (?) ...

- 1. 9: sg-': perhaps, *sgy''* (*saggī'ā*, “many, much”), or *sgyd'* (*sgīdā*, “to be worshipped”).
- 1. 9: *wm-šb*: perhaps, *wmḥšb* (*w-maḥšeb*, “and [he] considers/calculates”).



Translation (Recto A):

[2] ... holy/saint ... [4] ... and on earth giver (?) ... [5] ... in his mercy [6] ... Lord (?) ... [7] ... compassion (?) [8] ... of the worshippers (?) [9] ... to be praised (?) ... [14] ... full of (?)

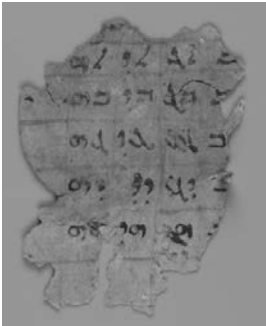
1. 4: yhwb': The first letter is uncertain, but may be a *yōd* with the two dots of the *zqāpā* (*-ā*) above it.
1. 6: *mr'*: There is no visible trace of ink between *mr* and the final *ālap*, but the shape of the *ālap* shows that it was joined to the preceding letter. If there was a letter in what appears now to be a blank space, the likely word is *mry'* (*māryā*, “the Lord”).
1. 7: *mrhmn--*: The end of the word is unclear. Perhaps, *mrhmnwt'* (*mrahmānūtā*).
1. 8: *dsgwā-*: Here again, the end of the word is unclear, but perhaps, *d-sāgōdē* “of the worshippers”, or a suffixed form of the same word. Cf. *sāgōdaw(hy)* (“his worshippers”) in the amulet fragment SyrHT 337.<sup>43</sup>
1. 8: *mšbh-*: The loss of the ending makes it difficult to determine the grammatical gender and number, but the word is probably either the participle (active or passive) of *šabbah* “to praise, glorify” (*mšabbah*, *mšabbhā*, *mšabbhīn* etc.), or the derivative adjective *mšabbhānā*.

<sup>43</sup> HUNTER & DICKENS 2014, 311.

The words that can be read with some certainty, such as “holy/saint” and “in/by his mercy” in Recto A, indicate that the text must be of a religious nature. There are letters at Recto B, l. 5, and Verso A, l. 3, which seem originally to have been written in red ink, suggesting that these letters were parts of headings. At Recto B, l. 5, the word in rubric is preceded by a blank which may be due to the wear of the paper and by what appears to be the independent form of the letter *bēt*. At Recto A, l. 10, too, there are the letters *bēt* and *mīm* in their independent forms, followed by punctuation marks, suggesting that those letters are being used as abbreviations or as numerals (i.e. *b* = 2, *m* = 40). Especially if we are dealing here with the use of letters as numerals, it may be that the text in this fragment is of a similar nature to that in the following fragment.

**3. Fragment Ot Ry 6221** [5.5 x 4.5 cm] (Figures 6 & 7)

On the recto of this fragment, which was published earlier in INOKUCHI 1989, 65, the first five letters of the Syriac alphabet are written in pairs within grids drawn in red ink. Although the beginning of each row is lost, we may assume that the following letters were present.

	<p>1 [ ' ' ] b ' g ' d ' h                  2 [ b ' b ] b b g g d d b h                  3 [ g ' g ] b g g g d d g h                  4 [ d ' d ] b d g d d d h                  5 [ h ' h ] b h g h d d h h</p>
<p>Fig. 6. Ot Ry 6221 Recto</p>	

Although the Syriac alphabet consists of 22 letters, blank boxes are visible to the left of and below the boxes that are filled, so that the table here probably only had the first five letters. At the top of the fragment, traces of writing are visible in the box above the box with the letters 'h. In the second and third rows, the letters *bēt*



and *gāmal* which are normally joined to the following letter are written in their independent forms.

The following words and letters can be read on the verso of the fragment.


	<p>1 [ ] <i>ps</i>[ ] - [ ]  2 [ ] <i>byš wmn hlyn p--</i> [ ]  3 [ ] --- --<i>yn -hr lk</i> ---[ ]  4 [ ]-- <i>b- nyš-</i> --' <i>tr̄yn b--l-</i>[ ]  5 [ ]---' <i>š--</i> [ ]  6 [ ] ' <i>lyt-</i> --- <i>byš'</i>[ ]  7 [ ]-<i>yš' zd---</i> --- --<i>yn -</i>[ ]  8 [ ] <i>tr̄yn -</i> [ ] -- [ ] <i>lyn -</i>[ ]  9 [ ] -- <i>m</i>[ ]-' -<i>g</i> -- [ ]  10 [ ] -- - [ ] --' [ ]</p>
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Fig. 7. Ot Ry 6221 Verso

Translation (Verso):

... [2] *bad (bīš)*, and out of these (*w-men hālēn*) ... [3] ... you/to you (*lāk*) ... [4] ... sign (*nīšā?*) ... two (*trēn*) ... [6] ... accursed (*līā*) ... bad (*bīšā*) ... [8] two (*trēn*) ...

1. 1. Little remains of the first line, but the visible letters may be part of the word *ps'* (*pessā*, “lot”).
1. 9. *m*[ ]-' : There is a gap in the paper in the middle of the word, but just after the gap is what appears to be the bottom part of the letter *taw*, suggesting the reading *mnt'* (*mnātā*, “part”), or *mlt'* (*melltā*, “word”).

Since the letters of the Syriac alphabet are used also as numeral signs, it is likely that the letters *ālap* to *hē* on the recto of the fragment stand for the numbers 1 to 5, and the occurrence of the word “two” (*trēn*) in two places on the verso of the fragment suggests that the table on the recto and the text on the verso of the fragment are related. Christian manuscripts from Turfan that involve the use of such numerals include calendrical texts,<sup>44</sup> but it is difficult to see how the table

<sup>44</sup> See DICKENS & SIMS-WILLIAMS 2012. In two Syriac fragments from Kurutka, the letters *ālap* to *zayn*, corresponding to numbers 1 to 7, are written repeatedly in a vertical column, and it has

of numerals “1-1, 1-2, 1-3, ... 5-5” can be connected with the calendar. Another purpose for which texts with numerals might have been used is divination, and the possibility that our fragment has to do with such practice is given support by the form of the table on the recto and by some of the words on the verso, such as “bad” and “accursed”, and especially, if the suggested reading is correct, “lot” (*pessā*).

The Christian manuscripts from Turfan include a number of divination texts, such as the Syriac-script Sogdian fragments E26/5-6<sup>45</sup> and the Syriac-script Uyghur fragment U 328 (from Kurutka).<sup>46</sup> Evidence that the kind of divination using sayings or oracles attributed to the Christian apostles and saints (“Sortes apostolorum/sanctorum”) was being practiced in Central Asia/Western China is provided by the Sogdian-script Sogdian fragment BL Or. 8212/182 (from Dunhuang) and the Uyghur-script Uyghur fragments U 320, U 187a and U 5179 (from Bulayïq).<sup>47</sup> The last named item, in particular, may have a certain affinity with our fragment in that each of the oracles (*yarlıg*) is given a number and is defined as “good” or “bad”.

As in the case of the prayer-amulets discussed above, most of the Syriac divination texts known to us are of recent date, but it is clear that the kind of divination envisaged here has a long and continuous tradition going back to the

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been suggested that these letters are connected with the seven days of the week (HUNTER & DICKENS 2014, 296-298, SyrHT 321, 323).

<sup>45</sup> SIMS-WILLIAMS 1995, 291-301; ID. 2015, 41-55. Sims-Williams points out the similarity between the material in E26/5-6 and the Syriac divinations texts in MS BL Or. 2084 (copied in 1755/5; see FURLANI 1918) and BL Or. 4434 (46v-58v; see FURLANI 1921a; cf. below).

<sup>46</sup> See ZIEME 2002, 390; ID. 2015, 113-117; HUNTER & DICKENS 2014, 490f.; and, on the Syriac passage in the same fragment and its implications, DICKENS 2021.

<sup>47</sup> On the Sogdian piece, see SIMS-WILLIAMS 1976, 63-65; ID. 2009, 286; on the Old Uyghur piece, ZIEME 2015, 119-123. It is possible that the Christian Sogdian piece in the Ryukoku Otani collection, no. 2497, mentioning the names of the apostles John and Judas, is also a text of this kind (see YOSHIDA 2017a; cf. n. 6 above). Perhaps to be connected with this kind of practice is the appearance of the name Jesus Christ (i śi myi śi ha) and other possibly Christian expressions in the Tibetan divination text from Dunhuang, BnF, Pelliot tibétain 351 (see URAY 1983, 412-419; ID. 1987, 202, 205f.; CHEN 2009, 209; YAN & GAO 2017).

earliest times.<sup>48</sup> An example of the “Sortes apostolorum” in Syriac (BL Or. 4434, 41v-46v, 19th century) is reported to have at the beginning a table with grids drawn in red and with the letters (y, š, w, ‘...) of the words “Jesus Christ appeared from Mary for the salvation of all creatures” in each of the boxes.<sup>49</sup> Similar tables, with the letters *ālap*, *bēt* ... used as numbers in the boxes, are found in Syriac (and Syriac-script Neo-Aramaic) divination texts in the same British Library manuscript (Or. 4434, 58v-78r) and in two of the manuscripts photographed by Al-Jeloo, although what we have in these examples are straightforward series of single numbers, rather than combinations of numbers as in our fragment.<sup>50</sup>

For an example of a Syriac divination text that uses combinations of numbers we may turn to a manuscript in the Mikhail Sado collection in St. Petersburg (no. 7, copied in 1900). The fifty-six “oracles” in this manuscript of lot divination are designated by combinations of three numbers between 1 and 4, beginning, for some reason, with the last (*d-d-d* = 4-4-4), followed by ‘-’-*b*, ‘-’-*g*, ‘-’-*d*, *b-b*-’ ... (= 1-1-2, 1-1-3, 1-1-4, 2-2-1 ...).<sup>51</sup> Divination texts involving such combinations of numbers are known from different linguistic traditions and from different periods of history, ranging from the “Homeric oracle” from Late Antique (4th-5th c.?) Egypt, in which the oracles are designated by combinations of three numerals between 1 and 6 (*ααα*, *ααβ*, ... ζζζ = 1-1-1, 1-1-2, ... 6-6-6),<sup>52</sup> to the

<sup>48</sup> On an early (6th/7th c.) example of divination in Syriac using the biblical text, see CHILDERS 2016; ID. 2019. See ID. 2016, 170 (and 2019, 130), on the canons of Rabbula (d. 435) and Jacob of Edessa (d. 708) prohibiting divination using the biblical text and texts (“lots”, *pessē*) ascribed to the apostles, which suggest that the practice of such divination was widespread at the time (cf. WIŚNIEWSKI 2020, 147f.).

<sup>49</sup> See FURLANI 1923, 358. The text has the title “Lots of the Holy Apostles” (*pessē da-šlīhē qaddīšē*).

<sup>50</sup> See FURLANI 1921b, 72; AL-JELOO 2012, 489, figs. 3 (Syriac) and 4 (Neo-Aramaic, translated from Syriac). The table in the text published by Furlani has the numbers 1 to 72; in the manuscript in Al-Jeloo’s fig. 3 and on the left-hand page of the manuscript in fig. 4, the numbers run from 1 to 71, while the table on the right-hand side of fig. 4 has the numbers 1 to 20.

<sup>51</sup> With thanks to Grigory Kessel for the information on this manuscript (cf. TEULE & KESSEL 2012, 53f.). As another method for divination/medical diagnosis involving numbers that is attested in Syriac, mention may be made of the numerological diagnosis based on the numerical values of the letters in the patient’s name; see HALL 1893, 137-142 (MS Harvard, Syr. 166, 1885 AD; on the manuscript, see GOSHEN-GOTTSTEIN 1979, 106); HUNTER 2009, 192f., 195-198 (John Rylands Library, Syr. 52B, 1794/5 AD); AL-JELOO 2012, 464.

<sup>52</sup> PREISENDANZ 1974, 1-6 (PGM VII 1-148); BETZ 1986, 112-119; MALTOMINI 1995; ZOGRAFOU 2013; MEERSON 2019. On an instance of divination using numerical tables in the same papyrus collection, see PREISENDANZ 1974, 81 (PGM XII 351-364); BETZ 1986, 165f., MALTOMINI 1986;

Old Turkic *Īrq bitig* from Dunhuang that uses combinations of three numbers between 1 and 4.<sup>53</sup> One problem we have in associating our fragment with the kind of divination represented in these documents is that, whereas the numbers ranging from one to four or six can easily be linked to the use of the six-sided or quadrangular oblong dice,<sup>54</sup> known examples of five-sided or quinquangular dice are hard to come by. Nevertheless, the features of our fragment such as the use of serial numbers and the form of the table on the recto give us sufficient reason at least to consider divination as a possible use of the text in the fragment.

### Concluding Remarks

Out of the three Syriac fragments discussed above, the nature of the text in fragment no. 2022 remains uncertain. Of the other two, no. 1789 is a prayer-amulet, and no. 6221, as has been argued above, may be connected with divination of some kind.

In a paper published in 1987, Wolfgang Hage remarked on the absence of materials showing evidence of popular devotional practices among the Christian finds from Turfan and noted that this situation probably does not quite represent the complete picture of the religious life of the East Syrian Christians in the Turfan Oasis.<sup>55</sup> The image Hage had of the situation in Turfan reflects, of course, in part the fact that the bulk of the Christian texts come from the monastery site at Bulayīq. Thirty-five years on, we know somewhat better about the popular practices, such as the use of amulets and divination, as evidenced by the texts from Turfan, as well as Dunhuang and Khara-Khoto. The Syriac fragments at Ryukoku University, discovered at sites other than Bulayīq, constitute a small

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BARRY 1999, 99 (with my thanks to my departmental colleague Hajime Tanaka for pointing me to these references).

<sup>53</sup> On *Īrq bitig*, see, for example, THOMSEN 1912, 190-214 and Plate II; TEKIN 1993; RYBATZKI & HU 2015. For some further examples from Central Asia, see RECK 2006, 124-126; EAD. 2010, 72 (Sogdian, from Turfan); FRANCKE 1924, 7-12; ID. 1928; NISHIDA 2018 (Tibetan); on some examples from the Islamic world, see the references cited in TAKAHASHI 2017, 198f., n. 55.

<sup>54</sup> On these oblong dice, see FRANCKE 1928, 114f.; SAVAGE-SMITH 1997, 150, 158; RECK 2010, 72; RYBATZKI 2010, 88.

<sup>55</sup> HAGE 1987, 57: "... Wir müssen hier also wenigstens den Verdacht äußern, daß unser zunächst günstiges Urteil über die Nestorianer in der Turfan-Oase nicht der ganzen Wahrheit entspricht, weil es die Frömmigkeit des Kirchenvolks in seinem Alltag nicht einbeziehen kann."

addition to those pieces of evidence relating to the more informal side of the religious life of the Christians in Central Asia and China. Evidence suggests also that many aspects of the popular religious practices and outlook of the Christians as reflected in these fragments were shared by members of other religious communities in the region. In that regard, it may be hoped that the study of such materials as the fragments examined here will contribute not only to our knowledge about the Christian community, but also to our understanding of the wider religious world of Central Asia and the neighbouring regions.

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## CURSIVE PALAEOGRAPHY AT TURFAN: EXPLORING ‘MEDIAL’ ESTRANGELA

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During its second and third seasons which took place between 1904-1907, the German Turfan Expedition team came across a monastery that was previously unknown and unrecorded in the official documentation of the Church of the East.<sup>1</sup> More than five hundred Syriac fragments were found at the site at Shuipang, Bulayīq, as well as material in Sogdian, Uighur, New Persian and Pahlavi.<sup>2</sup> This significant quantity of Syriac material was augmented by smaller finds from other sites scattered throughout the Turfan oasis, notably at Astana and Kurutka. The ‘Turfan’ fragments were brought back to Berlin just prior to World War I, where they are now housed in three repositories in Berlin.<sup>3</sup> As well as the Germans, the Russians and the Japanese were participants in the ‘great cultural game’ that was taking place in Central Asia. Nickolay Krotkov, the Russian consul at Urumqi, brought back 97 Syriac fragments from Turfan that now form part of the collections of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, St. Petersburg.<sup>4</sup> Count Kozui Otani, mounted an expedition between September 1902 - February 1904, which he personally funded. Three Syriac fragments were included amongst the material taken back to Japan and are in the archive of the Ryukoku University, Kyoto.<sup>5</sup>

The discoveries of Syriac manuscripts in different locations in the Turfan oasis indicate that the Church of the East was not just confined to a single monastic enclave at Bulayīq, but had established communities amongst the primarily Sogdian and Uighur populations.<sup>6</sup> The large numbers of Sogdian fragments, as

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<sup>1</sup> See SUNDEMANN, “Turfan Expeditions”, *Encyclopedia Iranica*. for a comprehensive account of the Turfan discoveries at <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/turfan-expeditions>. (retrieved 30.9.2021.)

<sup>2</sup> See VON LE COQ 1926, 88 for the discovery of the Syriac fragments from a single location at the monastery site. See also BOYCE 1960, ix-xxvii for overall details.

<sup>3</sup> These are: Oriental Department, Staatsbibliothek, Preußischer Kulturbesitz: Turfan Forschung, Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften; Museum für Asiatische Kunst, Berlin. For catalogues of the material see, HUNTER & DICKENS 2014; SIMS-WILLIAMS 2012; RECK 2018; and ZIEME 2015. These catalogues are now downloadable (<https://rep.adw-goe.de/handle/11858/00-001S-0000-0023-9A93-8>). Digital photos of the images are available at <http://turfan.bbaw.de/dta-i-en> and <http://idp.bbaw.de/idp.a4d>. (Retrieved 30.9.2021.)

<sup>4</sup> For further details, see MESHCHERSKAYA in EMMERICK ET AL 1996, 221-7.

<sup>5</sup> TAKAHASHI in TAKAHASHI-KOICHI 2017, 181-213.

<sup>6</sup> SIMS-WILLIAMS in CADONNA 1992, 43-61.

well as smaller quantities written in Old Uighur, cover a wide range of genres, and probably were the reading material for the monks who were drawn from the local communities. In stark contrast, the Syriac fragments, which were found at Bulayīq, are predominantly liturgical or biblical, reflecting the fact that Syriac was the language in which the liturgy was conducted.<sup>7</sup> In this way, the essential thread of public worship and devotion linked Turfan not only with other dioceses in the vast dominions of the Church of the East, but also with the patriarchate in Seleucia-Ctesiphon and later, Baghdad. How well the indigenous faithful in Central Asia, Afghanistan, Mongolia and China actually understood the Syriac liturgy is still to be determined. Probably, participation, over and above comprehension, was key; in the same way as peasants in Europe responded to the Latin Mass during the Middle Ages. That the liturgy was conducted in Syriac is hardly surprising for, over and above the vernacular languages of Turfan, it had an international prestige that transcended ‘locality and ethnicity’, being the Church of the East’s vehicle of intellectual and ecclesiastical transmission.

An intriguing question that surrounds the discovery of the Syriac fragments by the *German Turfan Expedition* is: ‘what works were written at the monastery?’<sup>8</sup> It probably will never be able to be fully answered and in fact a multi-layered approach might be proposed. Significant works might have been transported all the way from Mesopotamia thus upholding links with the great monastic centres. Other works, as has been proposed for MIK III 45, could have been the products of *scriptoria* in the major centres of the Church of the East at Marv, Samarkand and Kashgar; all being metropolitanates which must have hosted appropriate facilities.<sup>9</sup> Some works might have been produced *in situ* at Turfan. In this category might fall a small number of Syriac prayer-amulets, in scroll-form. Produced presumably at the request of individuals drawn from the local communities,<sup>10</sup> such items appear to have been copied from codex handbooks that could have originally hailed from Mesopotamia as their ‘pocket-book’ size would have made them eminently transportable. Over and above the liturgical and biblical manuscripts whose writing was governed by conservative palaeographic norms, prayer-amulets offer potential comment not only about manuscript production at Bulayīq, but also on the occurrence of vernacular or cursive forms of the ‘medial’ Estrangela script.

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<sup>7</sup> Sogdian prompts to assist the priest in the course of the liturgy occur in some manuscripts, indicating that it was a vernacular language. See BROCK & SIMS-WILLIAMS 2011, 81-92.

<sup>8</sup> It should be remembered that the remarkable manuscript finds came from one location at Bulayīq and cannot necessarily be presumed to represent the sum total of literary output at the monastery.

<sup>9</sup> The 61-folio manuscript MIK III 45 would appear to fall into this category. See HUNTER & COAKLEY 2017, 11 -16.

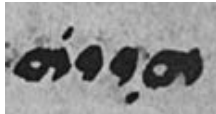
<sup>10</sup> This seems to have been the case with SyrHT 99 where the crease-marks are still visible. See HUNTER in TANG-WINKLER 2013, 23-41.

## Introducing Cursive Trends in ‘Medial’ Estrangelā<sup>11</sup>: MIK III 45

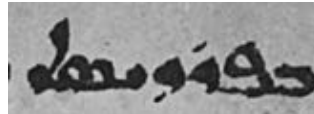
In his 1905 publication of a single folio from MIK III 45, which he only viewed from a photograph, Eduard Sachau described its script as, ‘Estrangelo mittlerer Zeit ohne irgend welche Besonderheiten’, “Estrangelo from the middle period without any special features”.<sup>12</sup> As an example of modified or ‘medial’ Estrangela,<sup>13</sup> MIK III 45 exhibits the changes that had taken place during the eighth and ninth centuries, which William Hatch summarized *viz*: “The letters are often small and less carefully formed, and the writing is more compact. The strokes of the letters are often heavier than they were in earlier times.”<sup>14</sup> In this vein, Erica C D Hunter and James Coakley discussing the palaeography of MIK III 45, noted that although “our manuscript is typical of eastern Estrangela manuscripts, it also has peculiarities”.<sup>15</sup> The two scribal hands that wrote MIK III 45 are generally clear and regular, but their calligraphy is not elegant and is marked by palaeographic differences.<sup>16</sup> Some of the characters, notably *Alap*, Final *Kap* and *Tau*, as well as *He* and *Waw* tend towards alternative, cursive forms.

Palaeographic interrogation of diagnostic characters in MIK III 45 fol. 26 *verso* and MIK III 45 folio 33 *verso* yielded the following results:

- *Dalath* and *Resh* are written with a round head i.e. a ‘comma’-shape by the first hand, but the second hand has tended to write the characters with a flat downward sloping head, forming a ‘wedge’-shape, although the ‘comma’-shape does occur.

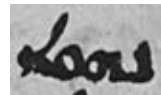


MIK III 45 fol. 26 *verso* l.21



MIK III 45 fol. 33 *verso* l.1

- *He* is written consistently with a closed loop by both hands and can be ligatured to the following character. The upper horizontal stroke has a concave inclination.



<sup>11</sup> Syriac script: ܐܘܨܬܪܐܢܓܠܐ, Alternative transcriptions: ‘*Estrangelo*, ‘*Estrangēlā* etc.

<sup>12</sup> SACHAU 1905, 973.

<sup>13</sup> HUNTER & COAKLEY 2017, 4.

<sup>14</sup> HATCH 2002, 26.

<sup>15</sup> HUNTER & COAKLEY 2017, 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

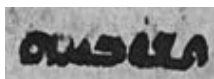


MIK III 45 fol. 26 verso 1.21      MIK III 45 fol. 33 verso 1.20

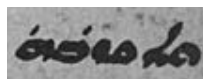
• *Waw* is often written closed but the open ‘medial’ Estrangela form does occur, notably at the beginning or end of a word. On occasion, the first-hand ligatures *Waw* to the following character; the second hand does this notably when preceding *Tau*.



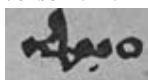
MIK III 45 fol. 26  
verso 1.12.



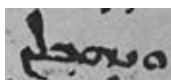
MIK III 45 fol. 26 verso  
1.21.



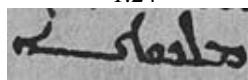
MIK III 45 fol. 26 verso  
1.24



MIK III 45 fol. 33  
verso 1.2

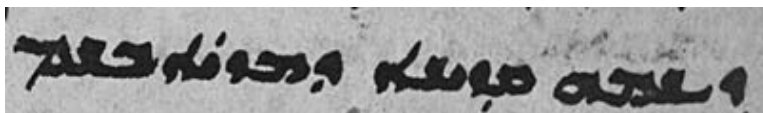


MIK III 45 fol. 33 verso  
1.3

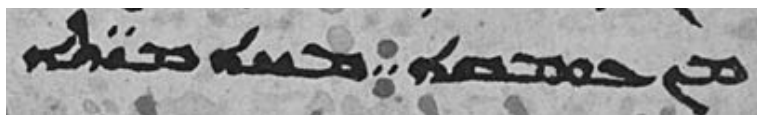


MIK III 45 fol. 33 verso  
1.32

• *Mem* is reminiscent of ‘medial’ Estrangela with the upper horizontal stroke having a conclave inclination. The bottom horizontal stroke is closed by the second hand.

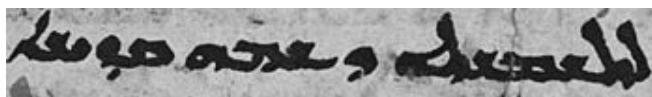


MIK III 45 fol. 26 verso 1.14



MIK III 45 fol. 33 verso 1.27

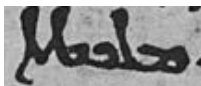
• *Alaph* is either written as a ‘medial’ Estrangela type or as a single down-stroke, with the tail curving to the right. The two forms are used alternatively, with the second hand sometimes curving the tail of the vertical stroke to the right.



MIK III 45 fol. 26 verso 1. 8

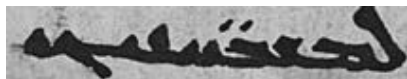


MIK III 45 fol. 33 verso 1. 11



MIK III 45 fol. 39 verso l. 30

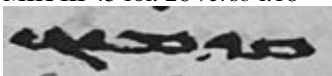
• *Final Kaph* in several instances the rounded cup of the ‘medial’ Estrangela form, has been elongated, deteriorating into a node, or kink, halfway down the tail, thus rendering the character similar to *Final Nun*. This feature occurs in both hands.



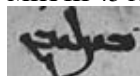
MIK III 45 fol. 26 verso l.18



MIK III 45 fol. 26 recto l.17

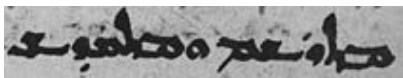


MIK III 45 fol. 33 verso l. 6

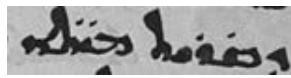


MIK III 45 fol. 43 recto l. 3

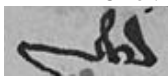
• *Tau* shows a tendency to be ligatured to the preceding and following letters, but is commonly written in the ‘medial’ Estrangela form i.e. a vertical stroke from the ‘humped’ horizontal base line. The second hand has sometimes modified *Tau* to write a distinctive cursive character with a loop at the top of the upright stroke and ligatured to the following character.



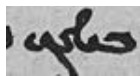
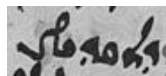
MIK III 45 fol. 26 verso l.13



MIK III 45 fol. 33 verso l. 8



MIK III 45 fol. 33 verso l. 2

MIK III 45 fol. 34  
recto l. 21MIK III 45 fol. 34  
verso l. 25

As one might expect from a manuscript that was used in liturgical context, the two hands penned MIK III 45 in the ‘medial’ Estrangela script. It is clear that both scribes were well-trained in palaeography, but differences do emerge between them; some of which might be attributed to the type of pens that were used and the responses to the paper medium of the manuscript,<sup>17</sup> as could be the case re the ‘wedge’-shaped head of *Dalath* and *Resh* that the second hand consistently writes. Compared to the first hand, the second hand shows a greater tendency to write cursive forms of some characters, the most notable being *Final*

<sup>17</sup> The technology of paper-making spread along the Silk Route to Mesopotamia where a paper-mill was established in Baghdad in 794/5. See: VON KARABACEK 1991, 26-7.

*Alaph* and *Tau*. Occasionally, these forms were dictated by spacing concerns, as is the case with MIK III 45 fol. 39 *verso* l.30, where the left-hand stroke of the *Tau* has been straightened in a bid to justify the left-hand margin.<sup>18</sup> Commenting on the cursive forms, Hunter and Coakley have stated, “[t]hey are all forms (except perhaps for final *kap*) that are attested in other places and at early dates, and they must have been common in ordinary, rapid handwriting. They appear especially in colophons where scribes allow themselves to write less formally than in the texts that they have copied.”<sup>19</sup>

Since MIK III 45 has lost its colophon such a line of investigation cannot be pursued. Marginal comments might be an alternative source of cursive writing, but the examples match the script of the main text, indicating that the two scribes penned them.

### **Exposing Cursive Trends: MIK III 45 (fols. 9 *recto-verso*, fol. 53 *recto*)**

MIK III 45 does however provide fresh insight into cursive palaeography in the form of prayers written by rudimentary hands on folios (fols. 9 *recto-verso*, fol. 53 *recto*).<sup>20</sup> As these originally blank folios appear to have been the outer pages of quires and were left blank, the prayers do not form an integral part of MIK III 45’s contents.<sup>21</sup> A palaeographic survey of diagnostic characters reveals the following cursive characteristics:

- *Dalath* and *Resh* display a round head i.e. a ‘comma’ shape.
- *He* has a ‘medial’ Estrangela form, with the character in MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto* showing a more rounded form than MIK III 45 fol. 9 *verso*.

<sup>18</sup> The scribe attempted to maintain a justified left margin re MIK III 45 fol. 39 *verso* l.30, where the left-hand stroke of the *Tau* has been straightened; as such the character resembles the *Alaph* to which it is ligatured.

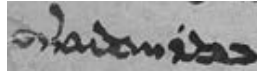
<sup>19</sup> HUNTER & COAKLEY 2017, 7.

<sup>20</sup> The prayer on fol. 9 *recto* consists of 20 lines with a change of pen at l. 13 and continuing for 4 lines on the *verso*. The prayer on fol. 53 *recto* consists of 16 lines.

<sup>21</sup> Hunter and Coakley record that quire signatures were written upside down by a later hand on the surviving blank outer pages of quires 2-5, i.e., fols. 10r and 23v 24), ٤(r and 37v 38), ٤(r (٤) and 54r (٤). See: HUNTER & COAKLEY 2017, 1. See also: SIMS-WILLIAMS 2012, 190, for a description of MIKIII45, f.37 TIIB26 (E44). In addition to various short texts and jottings in Syriac, these include a one-line Sogdian prayer in Sogdian script (f. 24R, first page of quire: “May our Lord God give help to (us) all!”) and a few lines of Sogdian in Syriac script (f. 37V, last folio of quire p, forming a double-folio with f. 24). The Recto of f.37 bears neatly written Syriac text in alternating black and red ink, with a single word (here counted as R34) below the last full line and a rubric with decorative punctuation in the outer margin. Its Verso was originally blank apart from the quire-number in the middle of the page (an upside-down p, here counted as V6), but was subsequently inscribed with the following texts in three different hands: two deleted lines of Syriac at the top of the page (V1-2); three lines of Sogdian in Syriac script, very clumsily and inaccurately written (V3-5, see citation below); and thirteen short lines of Syriac in the bottom right-hand quarter of the p



MIK III 45 fol. 9 verso l. 1

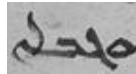


MIK III 45 fol. 53 recto l. 8

• *Waw* is closed, although occasionally is ligatured to the following character. In MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto* the letter is closed, but has a triangular form.

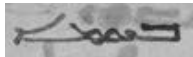


MIK III 45 fol. 9 recto l. 4

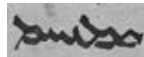


MIK III 45 fol. 53 recto l. 8

• *Mem* is rounded with the upper horizontal stroke in MIK III 45 fol. 9 *recto* now written as a 'v' shape. In MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto*, the character is closer in form to 'medial' Estrangela, with a concave horizontal stroke.

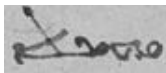
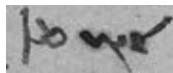
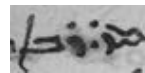
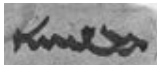
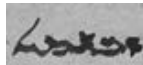


MIK III 45 fol. 9 recto l. 2

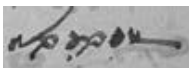
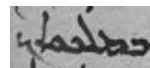


MIK III 45 fol. 53 recto l. 9

• *Alaph* in final position is written either as write a single vertical stroke with a tail that sometimes curves to the right. In MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto*, the form of *Alaph* is closer to 'medial' Estrangela, but in MIK III 45 fol. 9 *verso* the form is highly modified with the long horizontal oblique stroke culminating in nodule and a short tail curving to the right.

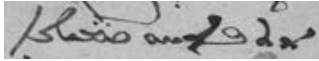
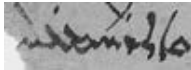
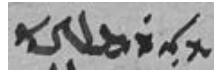
MIK III 45 fol. 9 recto  
l. 6MIK III 45 fol. 9 recto  
l. 18MIK III 45 fol. 9  
verso l. 2MIK III 45 fol. 53  
recto l. 1MIK III 45 fol. 53  
recto l. 12MIK III 45 fol. 53  
recto l. 14

• *Final Kaph* is 'medial' Estrangela, with a long, straight pointing to the right.

MIK III 45 fol. 9  
recto l. 2MIK III 45 fol. 9 verso  
l. 3MIK III 45 fol. 53  
recto l. 11

• *Tau* is written as 'medial' Estrangela in an unattached position as in the

prefix to *Ethpe'al* or *Ethpa'al*. Ligatured to a preceding character, cursive tendencies emerge in the loop at the top of the upward stroke in MIK III fol. 9 *recto*, while MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto* shows a highly stylized form.

MIK III 45 fol. 9 *recto* l. 9MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto* l. 14MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto* l. 16MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto* l. 6

Addressing the crucifixion amongst other topics, there is no indication of where and when these prayers were written; they may have been penned centuries after the eighth-ninth century dating of MIK III 45. Additionally there are no diagnostics to compare the ‘time and place’ of the prayers’ composition, both in relation to each other and to MIK III 45. However, the hands that penned the prayers on MIK III 45 fol. 9 *recto-verso* and MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto* have reproduced many of the features of ‘medial’ Estrangela that occur in MIK III 45, notably *He* and *Waw* and the rounded comma form of *Dalath* and *Resh*. The cursive form is a more pronounced in several other characters, with some differences between the two hands. In particular, the upper stroke of *Mem* in MIK III 45 fol. 9 *verso*, has adopted a pronounced ‘v’ shape, compared to MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto* where it is closer in form to ‘medial’ Estrangela. In MIK III 45 fol. 9 *verso* *Tau* is stylistically akin to the cursive form that is also a feature of the second hand of MIK III 45. In final position, *Alaph* can be written by a single vertical stroke or in a form that has derived from ‘medial’ Estrangela as in MIK III 45. Final *Kaph* in both MIK III 45 fol. 9 *recto-verso* and MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto* adheres to the form of ‘medial’ Estrangela and does not display the peculiarity that occurs in MIK III 45.

### More Cursive Palaeography: Prayer-Amulets in Scroll and Codex Format

Further exploration of cursive palaeography is possible via a handful of Syriac prayer-amulets from Turfan. Four, in scroll format, appear to have been personal items and as such probably were commissioned and written *in situ*.<sup>22</sup> Three of the exemplars were found at the monastery site at Bulayiq (Syr HT 99,<sup>23</sup> Syr HT

<sup>22</sup> See HUNTER 2018, 413-38 for further discussion of Syr HT 99, Syr HT 102 and n.364 *verso* as well as the codex leaf Syr HT 102, with comparison between the contents of n.364 and Syr HT 102, which both commemorate Mār Cyprian on 420-8.

<sup>23</sup> Syr HT 99 (T II B 53 = 1687). SyrHT means that the manuscript (Handschrift = H) is Syriac and comes from Turfan (T). T II B means that the fragment was found at the monastery site of Bulayiq (B) near Turfan, during the second campaign of the German Turfan Expedition in 1904-1905. Repository: Staatsbibliothek, Potsdamer Platz, Berlin. Syr HT 99 *recto* 10 lines, *verso* blank except for a drawing of the cross of the Church of the East. 7.9 cm (length), 5.0 cm (width).

152<sup>24</sup> and n.364 *verso*)<sup>25</sup> The fourth example (Otani Ry 1789),<sup>26</sup> the find-spot of which at Turfan remains unknown, is distinguished by its text being written on both sides of the folio.<sup>27</sup> Additionally, Syr HT 102 a leaf commemorating Mār Cyprian that probably was part of a handbook for prayer-amulets, has been included in the diagnostic analysis.<sup>28</sup> It is possible that such a work could have been written at another place and brought to the monastery.

Comparison of the hands of Syr HT 99, Syr HT 152, Otani Ry 1789 *recto*, n.364 *verso* and Syr HT 102 *verso* reveals the following palaeographic trends:

- *Dalath and Resh*: In Syr HT 99 and Otani Ry 1789 *recto* the characters tend to be written angular although the ‘comma’ form also occurs. In Syr HT 102

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Physically adapted from a much larger fragment, which was folded into three, its contents ask for God’s assistance, mentioning illness and also “magic, sorceries”, but are *non sequitur* since the trimming of the right-hand margin has meant that the words commencing many of the lines (cf. ll. 1, 4, 5 7, 8, 9 and 10) are incomplete. These indicate that Syr HT 99 originally came from a much larger folio, which was cut down. The fragment forms a dislocated join with Syr HT 330 (= 1863) which identifies Mār Tamsis as the saint to whom the anathema was addressed. For a transliteration, translation and discussion see, HUNTER, 2013, 23-41.

<sup>24</sup> Syr HT 152 (TII B 64). Repository: *Staatsbibliothek*, Berlin. 4.5 cm (length), 3.9 cm (width). *Recto*: two words written vertically flank the cross of the Church of the East, *verso* blank.

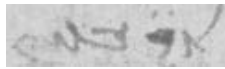
<sup>25</sup> n.364 *verso* is inscribed, but the contents are dissociated from the prayer-amulet. See HUNTER & DICKENS 2014 for a full description of this fragment. n.364 (T III T.V.B.). The lower-case initial indicates that the fragment is in Syriac or ‘Nestorian’. T III T.V.B. indicates that the fragment was found during the third campaign of the *German Turfan Expedition* that took place between 1905-1907. The initials T.V.B. (Turfaner Vorberge) suggest that the fragment came from the vicinity of Bulayīq, in the area north of Turfan, not from the actual monastery site. n.364: *recto* 9 lines, *verso* blank. 14.7 cm (length), 8.0 cm (width). Each word is demarcated by a red dot that is a unique feature amongst the Syriac fragments from Turfan. Entitled, “The anathema of the holy ... [Mār] Cyp[ria]n”. See HUNTER 2018, 422-8 for text, translation and commentary.

<sup>26</sup> Otani Ry 1789. Repository: Ryukoku University, Kyoto. *recto* 13 lines, *verso* 14? lines. 10 cm (length). Scroll format with trimmed side margins and a visible upper margin. The lower margin has been torn and so the prayer-amulet might originally have been longer. The contents on the *recto* that are directed against “all fevers and shiverings”, define it as a prayer-amulet. See TAKAHASHI 2017, 184-91 for text, translation and discussion with images of the text on p. 209. See also LINCICUM 2008, 544-549 for “all fevers and shiverings”, a phrase emanating from the Septuagint Deuteronomy XXVIII:22 that occurs often in incantation bowls and Jewish ‘magical’ texts.

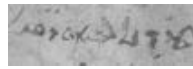
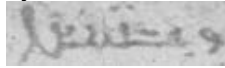
<sup>27</sup> Examination of Otani Ry 1789 is restricted to the *verso*, which is actually the *recto* since it marks the anathema’s beginning.

<sup>28</sup> Syr HT 102 (T II B53 no.3 = 1689) side (b). Repository: *Staatsbibliothek*, Potsdamer Platz, Berlin. *verso* 10 lines. 11.00 cm (length), 9.9 cm (width). Codex format. L.2 “the anathema of ... for the holy Mār Cyprian”, identifies it as an anathema with textual parallels to n.364-5. See HUNTER 2018. 420-2 for text and translation.

*verso* the head is written ‘wedge’ rather than rounded as occurs in n.364 *verso*.



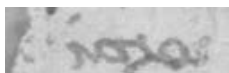
Syr HT 99 l.3

Otani Ry 1789 *recto* l.9

Syr HT 99 l.3

Otani Ry 1789 *recto* l.9Syr HT 102 *verso* l.2Syr HT 102 *verso* l.8n.364 *verso* l.8

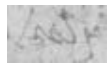
• *He*: in Syr HT 99 and Syr HT 102 *verso* the character is ‘medial Estrangela’, but has become more rounded in Otani Ry 1789 *recto*. As with Syr HT 99 and Syr HT 102 *verso*, Otani Ry 1789 *recto* writes the vertical stroke at a right-angle at the point of the ligature from the preceding character. On occasion, *He* is ligatured to the following character. n. 364 *verso* joins the rounded head directly to the vertical downward stroke.



Syr HT 99 l.2

Otani Ry 1789 *recto* l.2Syr HT 102 *verso* l.3Syr HT 102 *verso* l.8n.364 *verso* l.8

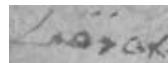
• *Waw*: exhibits a closed loop in Syr HT 99 and Otani Ry 1789 *recto*, although an open form does occur. In Otani Ry 1789 *recto* *Waw* is ligatured to the following letter whilst Syr HT 99 has multiple instances of this practice:<sup>29</sup> *Waw* is closed in Syr HT 102 *verso* and n.364 *verso* where it is on occasion ligatured to the following character. Syr HT 152 also features a rounded *Waw* ligatured to the following character.



Syr HT 99 l.6



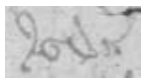
Syr HT 99 l.1

Otani Ry 1789 *recto* l.9Syr HT 102 *verso* l.6n.364 *verso* l.2n.364 *verso* l.8

Syr HT 152

<sup>29</sup> Notably ll. 1, 2 where *Waw* is ligatured to the following *He*, ll. 6, 9 where *Waw* is ligatured to the following *Taw*.

• *Alaph*: assumes a number of forms. In initial position, Otani Ry 1789 *recto*, Syr HT 99 and Syr HT 152 write a derivative of ‘medial’ Estrangela.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, in Otani Ry 1789 *recto*, *Alaph* in final position is denoted by a single vertical stroke that can be ligatured to the preceding letter,<sup>31</sup> although the upper part may end in a flourish.<sup>32</sup> In Syr HT 99 the upper part of the stroke may end in a loop as in MIK III 45,<sup>33</sup> but sometimes is just written as a straight stroke with a tail curving to the right that extends below the base-line.<sup>34</sup> It occasionally ends in an exaggerated flourish.<sup>35</sup> The down-stroke in Otani Ry 1789 *recto* culminates at the junction with the horizontal base-line. While *Alaph* in Otani Ry 1789 *recto* and Syr HT 99 displays highly cursive forms, in Syr HT 102 *verso* and n.364 *verso* it is derivative of ‘medial’ Estrangela where the form has been compressed, with the upper part of the vertical stroke ending in a nodule pointing left.



Syr HT 99 1.4



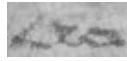
Syr HT 99 1.6



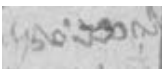
Syr HT 99 1.5



Syr HT 99 1.7

Otani Ry 1789 *recto* 1.2Otani Ry 1789 *recto* 1.7Otani Ry 1789 *recto* 1.9Syr HT 102 *verso* 1.4n.364 *verso* 1.5

• *Final Kaph*.<sup>36</sup> Syr HT 99 is ‘medial’ Estrangela with the vertical stroke drawn from the cup shaped horizontal stroke pointing downwards.<sup>37</sup> The well-executed example in Syr HT 152 is distinguished by a long, downward oblique stroke.



Syr HT 99 1.9



Syr HT 152

• *Tau*: assumes a number of forms. In Syr HT 99 and in Otani Ry 1789 *recto* it can be ligatured to following characters.<sup>38</sup> Two examples in Otani Ry

<sup>30</sup> Otani Ry 1789 *recto* ll. 1, 2, 5, 10; Syr HT 99 ll.3, 10, Syr HT 152).

<sup>31</sup> Otani Ry 1789 *recto* ll. 3, 5, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Otani Ry 1789 *recto* ll. 6, 9.

<sup>33</sup> Syr HT 99 1.4

<sup>34</sup> Syr HT 99 1.5, 1.6.

<sup>35</sup> Syr HT 99 1.8.

<sup>36</sup> Otani Ry 1789 *recto*, Syr HT 102 *verso* and n.364 *verso* have no extant examples of *Final Kaph*.

<sup>37</sup> Syr HT 99 1.8, 1.9.

<sup>38</sup> Syr HT 99 1. 4 [ligatured to following Nun], 1. 6 (2x) [ligatured to Tau]; Otani 1. 5, 1. 10 [ligatured to following Alaph].



1789 *recto*, in both cases are ligatured to a preceding *Shin*, are written in a very cursive fashion. An upward sweeping stroke descends into a curving stroke that connects to the following character so that the ‘bowl’ of *Tau* is no longer defined. Where it is ligatured to a preceding character, Syr HT 99 writes the *Tau* more conventionally. The oblique upper stroke joins the vertical downward stroke that ends in a curved hook or loop.<sup>39</sup> The vertical stroke of the geminated independent *Tau* in Syr HT 99 concludes in a left hook, approximating the form in MIK III 45.<sup>40</sup> Syr HT 102, Syr HT 152 and n.364 only exhibit ‘medial’ Estrangela and the cursive form does not appear.



Syr HT 99 l. 6

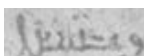


Syr HT 99 l. 9

Otani Ry 1789 *recto* l. 10Syr HT 102 *verso* l. 3Syr HT 102 *verso* l. 4n. 364 *verso* l. 8

Syr HT 152

• *Shin*: has a distinct cupped head on a short vertical stroke in Syr HT 99.<sup>41</sup> In Otani Ry 1789<sup>42</sup> *recto* and n.364 *verso* the character consists of a triangular form with a concave upper vertical stroke that is not connected to the horizontal base-line by a short vertical stroke. In Syr HT 102 *verso* the character has a cupped head, but like Otani Ry 1789 *recto* and n.364 *verso* it is written without the short connecting vertical stroke, thus reproducing the ‘medial’ Estrangela form.



Syr HT 99 l. 2

Otani Ry 1789 *recto* l. 10Otani Ry 1789 *verso* l. 6Syr HT 102 *verso* l. 6n. 364 *verso* l. 1n. 364 *verso* l. 4

• *Mem*: exhibits a closed form akin to ‘medial’ Estrangela, but instead of the horizontal upper stroke, the top of the character can be written rounded.<sup>43</sup> In Syr HT 102 *verso* and Syr HT 152 the junction with the upper oblique stroke is a distinct ‘v’ shape, that is intimated in n. 364 *verso*, but is not so pronounced. The character is further developed in Otani Ry 1789 *recto* where the body is

<sup>39</sup> Syr HT 99 l. 4, l. 5, l. 6.

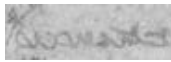
<sup>40</sup> Syr HT 99 l. 9. Cf. MIK III 45 [ttydqš].

<sup>41</sup> Syr HT 99 l. 2, l. 6, l. 7.

<sup>42</sup> Otani Ry 1789 *recto* l. 4, l. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Syr HT 99 l. 5, l. 7, l. 9, l. 10.

compressed and verges on the triangular, with a particularly distinctive example present in l.11.



Syr HT 99 l.7

Otani Ry 1789 *recto* l.Otani Ry 1789 *recto* l.11Syr HT 102 *verso* l.5n.364 *verso* l.8

Syr HT 152

### Comparing the Hands of Scroll and Codex Prayer-amulets

Although it cannot be established with certainty where the prayer-amulets Syr HT 99 and Otani Ry 1789 were written, by virtue of their utilitarian functions, it might be supposed that they were produced at Turfan, rather than being exotic exports. As such they provide graphic examples of palaeography with pronounced cursive features. Despite intrinsic differences between the copyists' hands, both prayer-amulets do exhibit common features, notably the two forms of *Alaph*: a stylized 'medial' Estrangela and, in final position, a straight 'Serta' style vertical stroke. *Shin* has a cupped head attached to the base line by a short stroke, although these features are less pronounced in Otani Ry 1789 *recto* than in Syr HT 99. In some instances the differences that do occur can be attributed to the natural writing style of the copyists as well as other factors, including the choice of pen. The circumstances in writing the prayer-amulet is also another factor to consider. The preparation of Otani Ry 1789 is very crude; spacing between the lines is uneven and the left-hand margin is not justified. Its appearance suggests that it was for all intents and purposes penned very hastily, producing a very rudimentary product.

By contrast, the hands of n.364 *verso* and Syr HT 152 are regular and even, as is that of Syr HT 102 *verso* which, being in codex form, is possibly a leaf from a handbook from which the scroll prayer-amulets were written in response to individuals' requests. The two lines of writing that flank the fine example of the distinctive cross of the Church of the East in Syr HT 152 have been carefully executed in a 'medial' Estrangela hand. Both n.364 and Syr HT 102 also show that care was taken in their preparation, with lines that are evenly spaced and justified margins. The right-hand margin of n.364 has been lost, but each of the lines culminates in a red-black *paragraphus* with a justified left-hand margin. *Mem*, *Tau* and final *Kaph* in n.364 and Syr HT 102 adhere to 'medial' Estrangela, but *Shin* is written, as in Syr HT 99 and Otani Ry 1789, with a cupped head and short vertical stroke. Likewise, *Alaph* has developed; rotating from the horizontal form of 'medial' Estrangela to an oblique-vertical stroke that points to the right and culminates in a nodule. Final *Alaph* consisting of a single vertical stroke does

not occur in Syr HT 102 *verso*, Syr HT 152 and n.364 *verso*. Likewise, in keeping with ‘medial’ Estrangela’, *He* and *Waw* are closed.

### Concluding Comments

In assessing trends in cursive palaeography some consideration needs to be given to the circumstances in which items were written. Notwithstanding idiosyncrasies between their hands, Syr HT 99 and Otani Ry 1789 provide graphic examples of cursive palaeography at Turfan, displaying the hallmarks of hasty production. To all extent and purposes, they appear to have been penned quickly – the texts were ‘dashed off’. As such the hands of Syr HT 99 and Otani Ry 1789 interpret palaeographic conventions flexibly, producing a variety of cursive forms. The hands of the prayer-amulets Syr HT 152 and n.364 *verso* reproduce ‘medial’ Estrangela more conservatively although they do also display cursive tendencies, as does Syr HT 102. However, the application of sporadic vocalization and the codex form suggests that Syr HT 102 may have been prepared in a scriptorium, i.e. in more controlled circumstances. The careful execution of Syr HT 152 where the fine drawing of the cross is flanked by text might suggest that it was a bespoke commission.

Some of the cursive traits that emerge in the prayer-amulets do also occur in the prayers on MIK III 45 fol. 9 *recto-verso* and MIK III fol. 53 *recto*. A notable example is *Mem* in Syr HT 102 and MIK III 45 fol. 9 *verso*. However, compared to Syr HT 102 where the final *Alaph* is a derivative of ‘medial’ Estrangela, the character in MIK III 45 fol. 9 *recto-verso* and MIK III fol. 53 *recto* displays an array of cursive traits that encompass both straight ‘Serto’ form and ‘medial’ Estrangela, albeit in highly stylized forms. The cursive form of *Tau* that is a distinctive feature of the second hand of MIK III 45 (i.e. fol. 33 *sqq*) also occurs in MIK III 45 fol. 9 *recto-verso* and MIK III fol. 53 *recto*. By contrast, with the exception of Otani Ry 1789 *recto* l.10 which features an ‘almost abstract’ *Tau*, the remaining scroll prayer-amulets i.e. Syr HT 99, Syr HT 152 and n. 364, as well as the codex Syr HT 102 more or less follow convention in their writing of ‘medial’ Estrangela. Most notably, the unique final *Kaph*, i.e. where the cupped head has been stretched to form a nodule midway along the downward oblique stroke, which is a distinctive feature of both hands that wrote MIK III 45, is not found either in MIK III 45 fol. 9 *recto-verso* and MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto* or in any of the prayer-amulets.

Basically, the hands somewhat fit the descriptors that William Hatch already identified in 1946. Discussing *Alaph*, he wrote, “Nestorian scribes used both the Estrangela and the Serta, and the two forms of the letter sometimes appear side by side in the same codex.”<sup>44</sup> The comma type of *Dalath* and *Resh* is commonly

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<sup>44</sup> HATCH 1946, 31.

used, with only MIK III 45 exhibiting the angular form.<sup>45</sup> Similarly it is only in MIK III 45 that the open Estrangela *He* and *Waw* are encountered.<sup>46</sup> The characters are closed in MIK III 45 fol. 9 *recto-verso* and MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto*, Syr HT 99, Syr HT 102, Syr HT 152, n. 364 and Otani Ry 1789. Although open forms of *Mem* are used by the scribe of MIK III 45 who penned fols. 1-33, in the other manuscripts the character is usually written closed but in Syr HT 102 *verso* and Syr HT 152 the concave upper stroke of *Mem* has developed into the pronounced ‘v’ shape characteristic of *Serta*.<sup>47</sup> *Shin* adheres to the ‘medial’ Estrangela form, albeit with some variation between manuscripts re the degree of the concave cupped head.<sup>48</sup> Cursive trends have emerged in MIK III 45 as well as the prayers written on MIK III 45 fol. 9 *verso* and fol. 53 *recto-verso*, but generally *Tau* adheres to ‘medial’ Estrangela forms.

Chronological and provenance indicators that would help define palaeographic trends are lacking. Only MIK III 45 has been securely dated: to the eighth-ninth centuries; the prayers written on MIK III 45 fol. 9 *recto-verso* and MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto*, as well as the prayer-amulets Syr HT 99, Syr HT 102, Syr HT 152, n. 364 and Otani Ry 1789 could have been written over a span of several hundred years, from the ninth century to the mid-fourteenth century when the Yuan Dynasty ended. Nor is there any certainty surrounding their provenance; Marv has been suggested as the place of composition for MIK III 45.<sup>49</sup> Despite such shortcomings, the scripts of MIK III 45 fol. 9 *recto-verso* and MIK III 45 fol. 53 *recto*, Syr HT 99, Syr HT 102, Syr HT 152, n. 364 and Otani Ry 1789 generally fall under the umbrella description of ‘medial’ Estrangela. This script and its cursive variants, appears to have been widely used throughout the region of Turfan. It also occurs in a paper folio that was discovered in cave B53 of the Mogao Caves complex at Dunhuang, which is written in a regular hand indicative of its liturgical contents that feature many Psalmic verses.<sup>50</sup>

As the palaeographic analysis of the material from Turfan has intimated the circumstances of production are inherent factors to consider, hence the co-existence and contiguity of cursive and classical forms of ‘medial Estrangela’. In this light, Lucas van Rompay’s observation: “the more evidence we take into

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 32 re the angular and rounded forms of *Dalath* and *Resh*.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 32-33 re the open and closed forms of *He* and *Waw*.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 33-34 re *Mem*.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 37 notes that the Nestorians only employed the Estrangela form of *Shin*.

<sup>49</sup> HUNTER & COAKLEY, 16

<sup>50</sup> DUAN 2001, 84-93, specifically p. 89 for the identification of B53:14 as “Before and After” and containing many Psalm verses. Images of B53 are provided in the article. The current author thanks Dr. Li Tang for drawing her attention to this article. Of course, it is possible that B53:14 was not written at Dunhuang, but brought from another location. See also KLEIN & TUBACH 1994, 1-13.

account, the more it becomes clear how diversified and complex Syriac handwriting was throughout the ages, allowing the coexistence of different styles and always leaving room for local and personal idiosyncrasies” certainly applies to the material from Turfan.<sup>51</sup> There are, however, signs of an emerging regionalism, perhaps connected with localised production. Indeed scrutiny of palaeographic trends is a fertile area ripe for further work in various dimensions. Extending the analysis from the Syriac texts to the Sogdian, Uighur and Middle Iranian texts written in Syriac, whose production was presumably localised might reveal particular ‘ethno-linguistic’ palaeographic patterns. Notwithstanding the *caveats* that accompany epigraphy, the Syro-Turkic tombstones engraved in Syriac script that have been found at various locations in Central Asia supply another fertile area to investigate, especially since they are often demarcated by chronological and provenance identifiers.

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<sup>51</sup> HATCH 1946, v.

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ROME, CONSTANTINOPLE AND THE MONGOLS:  
LATIN AND GREEK CORRESPONDENCE AS SOURCES FOR THE  
HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF THE EAST IN CENTRAL ASIA?

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Between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Church of the East as the third great branch of Christianity beside the Greek and the Latin traditions, established communities along the Silk Road amongst Iranians, Chinese, Mongols and various Turkic peoples living in Central and East Asia. At the peak of its geographical extension in the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries it was the most far-reaching Christian church of the so-called Middle Ages. The administration of its vast ecclesiastical territory with its connection to the patriarchate in the Middle East also confronted this church with special challenges, for example, problems of organisation and communication, which demanded special approaches. Practical solutions arose almost by themselves in the way that, on the one hand, the existing canon law was followed in principle; but on the other hand, it was modified under the specific circumstances. As Wolfgang Hage states, the organisational solution to this problem was to appoint metropolitans according to the traditional ecclesiastical regulations, but to endow them with special rights as “Metropolitans of the Exterior”.<sup>1</sup> Supposedly, they were only loosely connected to the Catholicos-Patriarchate in Bagdad in their distant church provinces, partly, and most probably, with suffragan bishops, whereby the cohesion of the church as a whole seems to be guaranteed by regularly ordaining candidates from the West to these metropolitans.

Much remains unclear about the Church of the East in Central Asia. The nature and extent of communication between the center (Baghdad) and the periphery and between many peoples within that periphery is a largely unexplored question. The Church of the East acculturated to different languages and cultures, and preserving its identity most likely by a common East Syriac ecclesial tradition and liturgy and the common heritage of the Syriac-Aramaic language and script, used among peoples of Central and East Asia. Tombstones and archaeological evidence demonstrate further that a distinctive iconography of the cross was a clear marker of identity even for the broad stratum of the population that could not read. However, in what manner was there an exchange among these

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. HAGE 2012, 63.



communities, which existed under many different political jurisdictions and whose cultural characters were profoundly different from one another? Were there small, loose communities along the Silk Roads that had hardly any contact with one another? Or was there a fruitful exchange among them using the frequented trade routes? How did communication work in practice? A more detailed research on literary and documentary texts as well as archeological remains direct us to a whole set of complicated questions. By what means can we bring together and synthesize the existing research findings on East Syriac Christianity in its so different cultural contexts, e.g. Chinese, Iranian, Turkic, Mongol, Tibetan, Sogdian, that sometimes existed loosely from one another? In what way were those communities along the Silk Roads integrated in the local environment? Were they? How did an apolitical entity operate within so many political systems? How did they celebrate their liturgy, pray and confess their faith? Just to name a few questions. It seems like having many pieces of a colossal puzzle without yet knowing how the final picture will look like.

Another piece in this puzzle could be the sources on the diplomatic missions between Roman Popes and the Mongols and between the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Mongols. As previously mentioned, this diplomatic exchange brought with it a whole range of letters and texts.<sup>2</sup> While medieval Western travelogues have been examined with regard to East Syriac Christianity, the correspondence of diplomatic missions to the Mongols have hardly been considered with reference to the Church of the East.

What information can be extracted here that could contribute to a historical reconstruction of the network of the Church of the East in Central Asia? The following remarks will not so much provide this analysis and answer this question but rather look at the existing sources available, which ought to be evaluated in the future. This miscellany intends to draw attention to a possible stock of sources in Latin and Greek from which information on the network of the Church of the East in Central Asia may be derived.

### **Latin Sources: Popes and Mongols**

Most of the Latin sources are not available in a contemporary edition. They were partly published in Latin in the 17<sup>th</sup> century or still lie in the archives. They have also only been studied in part up to now, and this almost exclusively with regard to their historical and political contexts. Probably the first account of contacts between the Roman Curia and the Mongols is the *Historia Tartarorum Ecclesiastica*, published in 1741 by Laurentius Moshemius.<sup>3</sup> It may be outdated, but is still interesting because of its appendix of sources. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jean-Pierre Abél-Rémusat achieved an astonishing pioneer work in research between

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. WINKLER 2020, 214f.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. MOSHEMIUS 1741.

the popes and the Mongols with his study published in 1822 and 1824.<sup>4</sup> His contemporary, Abraham Constantin Mouradzea d'Ohsson (1779-1851), provided a monumental history of the Mongols, which also made use of relevant sources.<sup>5</sup> In 1892, Reinhold Röhrich then turned his attention to the correspondence of the popes with the Orient and the Mongols and encouraged relevant researches.<sup>6</sup>

In fact, the first genuine historical-critical study came from Paul Pelliot in 1922/23, who elaborated on the diplomatic missions of John of Plano Caprini, Ascelin and Andrew of Longjumeau.<sup>7</sup> He examined individual Mongol letters primarily in historical-philological terms. Unfortunately, he did not carry out his intention also to investigate the later relations between Mongols and the Occident. Eric Voegelin offered a legal-historical and partly diplomatic analysis of the letters edited by Pelliot.<sup>8</sup> Gino Borghezio published in 1936 the interesting official announcement of the Mongolian legation and participants in the Council of Lyon (1274).<sup>9</sup> Burkhard Roberg integrates this text into a thorough historiographical study in 1973.<sup>10</sup> Well known is the Latin but somewhat outdated edition of some sources by Jean-Baptist Chabot concerning the times of the Il-Khanate of Arghun.<sup>11</sup> The original Mongol documents, which have come down to us from the Il-Khans Abaqa and Arghun were superbly edited by Antoine Mostaert and Francis Woodman Cleaves in 1952 and 1962.<sup>12</sup> The two letters of Yahbalaha III, which were sent to Rome in 1302 and 1304 were excellently edited by Laura Bottini and translated into Italian in 1992.<sup>13</sup>

An indispensable work for finding relevant sources is the *Bibliotheca Missionum* edited by Robert Streit. Volume IV deals with Asian mission literature from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The work does not edit sources, but refers to archives, libraries and studies on bulls and breves of popes.<sup>14</sup> According to Streit, "Popes Innocent IV, Nicholas IV, Clement V, John XXII, Benedict XII and Boniface IX are great missionary popes and the years 1245, 1291, 1318, 1321, 1329, 1338 great missionary years."<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, in this area the sources are becoming

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. ABEL-REMUSAT 1822/1824.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. D'OHSSON 1834.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. RÖHRICHT 1891.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. PELLIOT 1922-23.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. VOEGELIN 1940-41.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. BORGHEZIO 1936.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. ROBERG, 1973.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. CHABOT, 1894 and 1895.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. MOSTAERT - CLAEVES 1952 and 1962.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. BOTTINI 1992. For a historical contextualisation and an English translation of these letters, see WINKLER 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. STREIT 1964.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, section VIII.

increasingly dense, but they still need to be sorted, systematised and evaluated. This has not yet been done.

In my considered view, the most up-to-date study of the correspondence between the popes and the Mongol rulers in the 13<sup>th</sup> century is provided by Ernst Lupprian.<sup>16</sup> For the first time, Lupprian critically edited 69 papal letters to Muslim and Mongolian rulers. Of these, 32 are to be seen in connection with the Mongols. He provided essential information on the transmission of the originals, the papal registers, letter collections, form books as well as on diplomacy – the archival method to study mediaeval documents.

The studies and editions presented here in overview may provide a basis for further research. It is clear that in all the sources mentioned, the political relations with the Mongols were at the centre and the attempt to convert the Mongols to Christianity was behind the papal motive. The Church of the East was not a direct contact for the popes in these sources, but – as in the travel reports of Western envoys – it can be expected that information on Christianity in Central Asia can be extracted from them.

It seems that most of the letters from the Orient are preserved solely in Latin translation and their authenticity can only be proved by the relevant diplomatic literature. Here we are dependent on the experts in diplomacy studies of these materials, who can offer authenticity, protocol and dating of these sources.

The exchange of diplomatic missions and correspondence also required a corresponding knowledge of the language. It is extremely interesting to note that the Vatican seems to have been incredibly ignorant of languages. The other was expected to know Latin. The relevant study by Berthold Altaner is highly instructive, who states, among other things, that “there is no talk of a fundamentally striving, purposeful care for the study of languages and a cultivation and improvement of the interpreting system at the Roman Curia for the time we are interested in here [i.e. 13./14<sup>th</sup> c.]”<sup>17</sup> There are simply no translators (*interpretes*) to be found among the numerous categories and groups of curial officials at the papal court. This ignoring of language skills can presumably be explained by a sense of superiority and probably also by the arrogance of the papacy at a time when it was at the height of its power. In addition, the envoys from the Orient, who came to the papal court were mostly able to communicate, because there was a successful system of interpreting in the Orient. Thus, linguistically skilled representatives and interpreters could be sent to Europe. “In practice, the vast majority of missions to the papal court brought with them a member who knew Latin or the lingua franca, or an interpreter

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<sup>16</sup> LUPPRIAN 1981.

<sup>17</sup> ALTANER 1936, 86f.

familiar with these languages.”<sup>18</sup> The diplomatic missions from the Orient were often in a position to attach an official Latin translation to the original credentials. Nevertheless, it sometimes caused the Curia certain difficulties if the language skills were not available. As Karl-Ernst Lupprian demonstrates, when the papal archives were inventoried in 1336, for instance, there was no one who could identify and archive foreign-language letters from the Mongol Empire. Since the inventory clerk could not classify the letters, he placed the pieces with the Greek writings.<sup>19</sup> The papal idea of taking the Gospel to the Mongols was probably bound to fail also due to the missionaries’ lack of language skills. Diplomatic negotiations were also made difficult because both sides could not be completely sure how reliable and trustworthy the interpreter was. This can be seen very well, for example, in the travel report of William of Rubruck about his first encounter with Great Khan Möngke (Mangu), since he got into trouble regarding the interpreter: “...Unfortunately for us, our interpreter was standing next to the stewards, who gave him a good deal to drink, and in no time he grew tipsy. Then the Chan had falcons and other birds brought, which he took on his hand and inspected, and after a long interval ordered us to speak. At this point we had to kneel. He had an interpreter of his own, a Nestorian, who I did not know was a Christian, and we had our interpreter, such as he was, who in addition was already drunk.”<sup>20</sup>

In contrast, the report of a Hungarian Dominican in 1233 is interesting. He met a Tatar envoy in the area of the Golden Horde who spoke “German, Hungarian, Russian, Khuman, Sarazen and Tatar”.<sup>21</sup> The advancement of Western merchants into the Kipchak and Persia also meant that Europeans entered the service of the Mongols and acted as interpreters. Several such Westerners are mentioned in papal bulls. On the other hand, Oriental Christians with language skills were also called upon to serve as ambassadors. Thus, Russians, Italians as well as Syriac and Armenian clerics also served as interpreters for the Mongols.<sup>22</sup> In other words, in contrast to the Occident and especially the Roman Curia, the interpretation system was generally better organised in the governing bodies in the Orient and diplomatic written and oral communication could be carried out well. Berthold Spuler explains this with the circumstance that linguistically skilled occidental personnel could easily be taken into service in the East. For with the beginning of the Crusades, a gradually increasing penetration of the Orient was initiated by soldiers, captives, slaves, merchants and soon missionaries.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 90.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. LUPPRIAN 1981, 95.

<sup>20</sup> JACKSON 1990, 179.

<sup>21</sup> SPULER 1936, 104.

<sup>22</sup> LUPPRIAN 1981, 98, footnote 35.

<sup>23</sup> SPULER 1936, 90f.

For our sources, this means that we ultimately have to fall back on Latin for the most part. The papal letters were of course written in Latin and the oriental correspondence often came with a Latin translation which were not always entirely accurate.<sup>24</sup> This needs to be considered and taken into account when evaluating these sources.

### **Greek Sources: Constantinople and the Mongols**

Due to a Eurocentric historiography that focused mainly on Central and Western Europe in the Middle Ages, the awareness of ecclesiastical exchange between Constantinople and the East in Western Church History is sparse. From the perspective of medieval Catholic historical narratives, Constantinople was already the ecclesiastical East, despite the fact that it is still the Europe we are talking about. For the period that is concerned, the sphere of influence of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople included Eastern and Southeastern Europe as well as the Eastern Mediterranean. For a brief presentation here, therefore, the research of Byzantine studies is of particular interest, which rightly also pays attention to the “other Middle Ages”.<sup>25</sup> In any case, Constantinople was better equipped than Rome in terms of language. A special court office was set up at the Greek imperial court, which was responsible for the translation of foreign-language documents received an international correspondence and also had to appoint interpreters for spoken meetings.<sup>26</sup>

Johannes Preisser-Kappeler draws attention to the activities of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in the Mongol sphere of power.<sup>27</sup> He shows that despite all the destruction, the Mongol conquests also opened up new opportunities for trade, religion, science and for highly mobile groups from East Asia to the Mediterranean. This was despite the division of the Mongol Empire into four almost independent khanates from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, which did not at all prevent from establishing relations and exchange. “The Patriarchates of Constantinople and of Antioch used the opportunity to establish a really ecumenical scope only up to a certain degree in the immediate neighbouring Mongol realms of the Golden Horde and of the Īlḥāns, while the East Syrian (‘Nestorian’) Church, for instance, once more consolidated its positions from Mesopotamia to China and the Papacy temporarily extended its hierarchy to the (new) limits of the known world. ... Still, a survey of sources in a variety of languages allows us to capture and depict the entanglement of what we may have

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<sup>24</sup> Cf. WINKLER 2020, esp. 220f.

<sup>25</sup> I would like to thank my colleague Preiser-Kapeller for his advice and references to relevant research on Constantinople's relations with the Mongols. See the blog by Johannes PREISER-KAPPELLER of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, which opens up a global perspective on the period between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and combines historical science with complexity theory, network analysis and environmental history. Cf.: <https://www.dasanderemittelalter.net>.

<sup>26</sup> SPULER 1936, 91.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. among others PREISER-KAPPELLER 2012 and 2015.

only considered as peripheral regions within the framework of *Notitiae Episcopatum* and of the Register of the Patriarchate within the far wider medieval world in a better way.”<sup>28</sup>

In the context of our question, it seems that the sphere of interest of Constantinople was mainly the Golden Horde and the Ilkhanate. The most valuable source is obviously the Register of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.<sup>29</sup> According to Christian Gastgeber, it is thanks to a fortuitous coincidence that two Greek manuscripts of this Register (ÖNB, Codex Hist. gr. 47 and 48) have been preserved in Austria.<sup>30</sup> It contains more than 800 documents written by or for the Patriarchate and the Synod of Bishops of Constantinople. The Register of the Patriarchate is one of the most important sources for the religious, political and social history of the Byzantine Empire in the last centuries of its existence. Franz Xaver von Miklosich and Joseph Müller presented the documents in an early edition from 1860 and 1862.<sup>31</sup> The first volume contains ÖNB, Codex Hist. gr. 47, Volume 2 ÖNB, Codex Hist. gr. 48. In the 1960ies, Franz Dölger and Peter Wirth made available the registers of the emperors 1204 to 1453.<sup>32</sup> In 1971, Vitalien Laurent edited registers to all documents, which were published by the Patriarch and Synod of Constantinople for the period from 1208 to 1309.<sup>33</sup> This endeavour was continued from 1977 to 1991 by the French Byzantinist Jean Darrouzès who edited three more volumes covering the period from 1310 to 1453.<sup>34</sup>

A new endeavour has been undertaken by a team of the Austrian Academy of Sciences (Byzantine Studies Vienna), which has provided a superb edition of the documents from 1315 to 1372 together with a German translation. Three volumes were published between 1981 and 2001.<sup>35</sup> The next volume, announced by Christian Gastgeber and Johannes Preiser-Kapeller, is supposed to cover the years from 1364 to 1372.

This is a decidedly rich treasure of sources which *prima vista* does not immediately lead one to expect information on the Church of the East in Central Asia. The Patriarchate of Constantinople was more active in its immediate area, which nevertheless extended beyond the Black Sea and reached the Caspian Sea.

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<sup>28</sup> PREISER-KAPPELLER 2015, 359.

<sup>29</sup> GASTGEBER–MITSIOU–PREISER-KAPPELLER 2013.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. GASTGEBER 2007.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. MIKLOSICH - MÜLLER 1860-1862.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. DÖLGER-WIRTH 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1977.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. LAURENT 1971.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. DARROUZÈS 1977-1991.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. HUNGER-KRESTEN 1981; HUNGER-KRESTEN-KISLINGER-CUPANE 1995; and KODER-HINTERBERGER-KRESTEN 2001.

The Golden Horde played a prominent role in Patriarchal Politics.<sup>36</sup> However, the Orthodox Church of Constantinople also extended its activities in the context of east roman imperial policy to the centre of the Persian Ilkhanate.<sup>37</sup> Already Gregory Bar Hebraeus († 1286) referred to diplomatic missions by the emperor Michael VII Palaiologos to Hülägü, which took place in 1261 and 1265. And a Greek Christian community is documented to have existed in Tabriz by the astronomer Gergorios Chioniades († 1320) in the 13<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>38</sup> Further diplomatic missions were sent by Emperor Andronikos II to Ghazan and Öljeitü took place in 1304 and 1305.<sup>39</sup>

This generates extreme curiosity, traces of more far reaching ecclesial connections are also found. As the research by Klaus-Peter Todt, Jean Dauvillier and Wassilios Klein has demonstrated, a see of a Katholikos of Romagryis and Persia “has been created for the pastoral care of Chalcedoniansian Christians who had been deported to Eastern Iran and Central Asia in earlier centuries. The residence of this hierarchy was originally in the city of Tāškand (Tashkend), in the first half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century maybe in Nišāpūr (in Khorasan, today’s northeastern Iran). Information on this remote province of the Byzantine Church is infrequent and sometimes confusing; its continued existence during the Mongol period has been doubted.”<sup>40</sup> However, these particulars may suffice here to point out that one may confidently ask whether there might not also be indications in Greek sources of the Patriarchate of Constantinople about the Church of the East.

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<sup>36</sup> PREISER-KAPPELLER 2015, 352; cf. PREISER-KAPPELLER 2012.

<sup>37</sup> KOROBEINIKOV 2014, esp. 204-2016.

<sup>38</sup> PREISER-KAPPELLER 2015, 353.

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THE NAME *SALIBA* IN NESTORIAN TURKIC EPITAPHS  
IN KYRGYZSTAN AND ITS DIRECT RELATIONSHIP TO  
THE WORD *ČĀLĀBĪ* IN ANATOLIAN TURKISH

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### 1. *Saliba* in Medieval Christian Names

The word “*Saliba*”<sup>1</sup> appeared as a special word used by some patriarchs to attach to their names in medieval Syriac Christianity. Some of them bore the name because they belonged to the Sliba family in the Levant, such as the Nestorian patriarch / Catholicos of Seleucia-Ctesiphon *Saliba-Zakha* (714-728),<sup>2</sup> *Saliba ibn Yuhanna* from Mosul in the 14<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>3</sup> *Rabban Sliba* of Hah from Mardin (father of *Rabban Joshua*, d. 1340) in the 14<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>4</sup> the bishop of Mardin *Ishoq Saliba* (*Ishoq Saliba* ܐܝܫܘܩ ܣܠܝܒܐ, d. 1730) from the 18<sup>th</sup> century, etc. This word which has many alternative spellings, is, according to D. Chwolson, a “Syriac name which has been frequently used”.<sup>5</sup>

### 2. *Saliba* / *Čelipa* on the Nestorian Gravestones in Central Asia

While accepting Christianity, Nestorian Turkic communities in Central Asia adopted also some of the Syriac religious formulas, salutation forms and dating systems, such as the words “ܩܒܪܐ qabra / qavrah” (‘grave’)<sup>6</sup> and “ܡܗܝܡܢܐ *mhaymna*” (‘male believer’, *mu’min* in Arabic), ܡܗܝܡܢܬܐ *mhaymnta* / (‘female believer’, *mu’minat* in Arabic). Besides, those communities embraced some Syriac personal names including the name “*Saliba*,” and used them together with their own Turkic ones.<sup>7</sup> Today, the majority of Nestorian gravestones can be found in Kyrgyzstan Republic in which ten of them include the word “*Saliba* / *Čeliba*”. However, as far as we can see, all the inscriptions that include “*Saliba*” are in Syriac but not in Turkic.<sup>8</sup> Gravestones from the Mongol-Yuan period

<sup>1</sup> Alternative forms: *S<sup>h</sup>liba*, *Sliba*, *C<sup>h</sup>liba*, *Čelipa* etc.

<sup>2</sup> CHWOLSON 1890, 107; DICKENS 2009, 22; GILLMAN & KLIMKEIT 1999, 359; BAUM & WINKLER 2003, 46, 173; BAUMER 2008, 153; DICKENS 2015, 10.

<sup>3</sup> BAUM & WINKLER 2003, 57.

<sup>4</sup> See PEETERS 1908.

<sup>5</sup> CHWOLSON 1890, 134.

<sup>6</sup> About the word “ܩܒܪܐ qabrā / qavrah”, see BORBONE 2005, 16-17 and n. 38; BORBONE 2008, 4.

<sup>7</sup> About this matter, see KLEIN 2002, 215-216.

<sup>8</sup> About 600 gravestones engraved in “Turkic in Syriac letters” have been found in Central Asia. On the bilingualism, philological features in these inscriptions as well as an attempting to

(1271-1368) have been found in the region of the former Önggüds and in Quanzhou and they are also written in the Turkic language but in Syriac script. However, according to the studies by scholars who read and published these texts, they haven't encountered the word *Saliba* or *Čelipa*.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, outside Kyrgyzstan for instance, in Uzbekistan, among the discovered Turkic gravestones that are written in Syriac letters, there are no signs of this name. As far as we know, even though Syro-Turkic gravestones are not catalogued yet, it is interesting to see the word *Saliba* or *Čeliba* only appears in the gravestones located in Kyrgyzstan. It should be noted that V. Rybatzki who had prepared a monography about personal names in Nestorian gravestones in Central Asia did not mention a name just like *Saliba* or *Čelipa*.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. *Saliba*/*Čeliba* and Other Turkic Words in Funeral Inscriptions from Kyrgyzstan

**Čeliba:** This word appears in an undated text kept in the Hermitage Museum, which is a female name. Chwolson, due to the adjective form “*tlitaa ܐܠܝܒܐ*” (‘young lady’), transcribed this as a female name.<sup>11</sup> The word with this adjective was also found in an epitaph dated to the year of the ox which corresponds to 1636 (AD1325) in the Seleucid era. Likewise, the word *ܐܠܝܒܐ* with an adjective “*tlitaa ܐܠܝܒܐ*” (‘young girl’) is seen in another epitaph from the year of the snake listed No.234 in Chwolson’s register. It was read by Chwolson as “Zelîbâ *ܐܠܝܒܐ*” in the new edition of his work.<sup>12</sup>

In another inscription in the Hermitage Museum, which was dated to 1649 of the Greeks (AD1338), the word “*Saliba* (or *Čeliba*)” occurs.<sup>13</sup> Chwolson concluded that the word he read as “*Seliba*” is a female name because the pronoun comes before it.<sup>14</sup>

**Čliba:** The word is found in a stone inscription in Burana, now located in Central State Museum of Kazakhstan (Almaty). The stone is dated to 1628 of the Greeks (AD1316-1317) and its inscription is in Syriac.<sup>15</sup> W. Klein transcribed this as “*Šlîbâ*”, Jumagulov read it as “*Čliba*”. Although he transcribed this as a male name, in the fifth line of the inscription there is a term “*Čliba mhaymntâ*”

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“Syriacize” the standard language, see BORBONE 2008, 3-10. Borbone stated that “the most part of the epigraphs also in the Syriac language; some are in Turkic”, but the number of the latter ones is only about 30 (BORBONE 2008, 10).

<sup>9</sup> See LIEU, FRANZMANN, GARDNER, PARRY & ECCLES 2012.

<sup>10</sup> See RYBATZKI 2004.

<sup>11</sup> CHWOLSON 1890, 98; JUMAGULOV 2014, 33, 298-299.

<sup>12</sup> CHWOLSON 1897, 25, 42.

<sup>13</sup> JUMAGULOV 2014, 332-333.

<sup>14</sup> CHWOLSON 1890, 83 Taf.49,5 (129), 98, 135.

<sup>15</sup> JUMAGULOV 2014, 31, 436-437; KLEIN 2000, 168, 406 Abb.52.

(‘faithful woman’). Jumagulov has not translated this part and now it is understood that it is a female name.<sup>16</sup>

**Selîbâ- / Čeliba - Quštānč:** Originally, Chwolson noted an undated Syriac epitaph of the year of the monkey has Selîbâ as a female name because its pronoun “quštānč” occurred at the end of the word.<sup>17</sup> K. Groenbech had once pointed out that “*the name Koštānč is used as a female name only*”.<sup>18</sup> And Jumagulov who published the pictures of the epitaphs kept in the Hermitage Museum concluded that the combined names Selîbâ- / Čeliba - Quštānč were Turkic and Christian names. Jumagulov believed it to be a female name and gave both of its spellings: “Seliba-Quštānč” and “Čeliba-Quštānč”.<sup>19</sup>

**Selia:** This word appears in a Syriac inscription dated to 1631 of the Greeks (AD1320), and the word that has the phrase “faithful woman” before it. Chwolson read as “Selia” (“Zelia”) ܠܝܠܝܐ and has speculated that this is “Zeliva” which is the misspelling of “Saliba ܠܝܠܝܐ”, Jumagulov also transcribed the same word “Selia / Seliba” as a female name.<sup>20</sup>

**Selîvâ son of (Seliba), Yuhannan the Akpash:** The word “Selîvâ ܠܝܠܝܐ” appears in a Syriac epitaph of the year of the rabbit dated to 1638 of the Greeks (AD1326) in connection with the name of Yuhannan. Chwolson noted that this is “Şelîbâ ܠܝܠܝܐ” and transcribed Şelîvâ as a male and Şelîbâ as a female name in terms of gender.<sup>21</sup> However Chwolson in the new edition of his work, epitaph No. 167, he translated: “This is the grave of a young girl named Zeliwa. Died from plague”. He noted that the text is only Turkic and read the word ܠܝܠܝܐ as

<sup>16</sup> In Syriac, “mhaymnā ܡܗܝܡܢܐ ‘believer’ is a word used for the men, and “mhaymntā ܡܗܝܡܢܬܐ for the women. See DICKENS 2016, 117-118; JUMAGULOV 1971, 150.

<sup>17</sup> CHWOLSON 1890, 13. According to Chwolson, the word “*Selîbâ*” here is a woman’s name apparently, and the second one (*koštānč*) is its pronoun (p. 97). About the word “qostanc” and its usage in Turkic gravestones in Syriac script, see BORBONE 2008, 3, fn.8.

<sup>18</sup> GROENBECH 1939, 308.

<sup>19</sup> CHWOLSON 1890, 97; DJUMAGULOV 1987, 57-58, 122, 124 (Tabl. XIV, ris. 13; Tabl. XIV, ris. 17 (must be 15); JUMAGULOV 2014, 33, 224-225. Neither Djumagulov, in his book published in 1971 mentioned these names in the list of Turkic and Syriac male and female personal names (pp. 67-68), nor did Rasonyi list a female personal name for “quštānč” or “qoštānč”, although he had pointed out a male one “Quštan” in the works by Chwolson (RASONYI 1964; RASONYI & BASKI 2007, 505). This female name does not appear in the monographic work by Rybatzki as well. See RYBATZKI 2004. According to the late Prof. W. Sundermann’s explanation the word “qoštānč” is originated from Sogdian \*χwšt’nc (‘Lehrerin/lady-teacher, governess’). See KLEIN 2000, 267 (his transcription: qōštanč); SUNDERMANN 1995, 227; NIU 2004, 62-63.

<sup>20</sup> CHWOLSON 1897, 22; JUMAGULOV 2014, 33. For a change of voice b = v/w among the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century Uyghurs and a similar example to it in the Nestorian gravestones, see CHWOLSON 1890, 64, n.2, 67.

<sup>21</sup> CHWOLSON 1890, 66-67, 134, 135 (“ܠܝܠܝܐ ist nach der neusyrischen Aussprache ܠܝܠܝܐ, b=w, geschrieben statt ܠܝܠܝܐ” (p. 67), “ܠܝܠܝܐ Şelîvâ statt ܠܝܠܝܐ, Selîbâ, No.38, ist ein sehr häufig vorkommender syrischer Name” (p.134).

“Zeliwa” although in the original word, it looks like a /b/ instead of /w/,<sup>22</sup> which caused some confusions. Indeed, Klein also pointed out that it was “ܠܝܘܐ sliwa” in the meaning of “cross” instead of “ܠܝܒܐ sliba”.<sup>23</sup>

These inscriptions where the words “Saliba” / “Čeliba” occur were written in Syriac not Turkic, and it is understood that *Saliba* / *Čeliba* were used as both female and male names. It shows that the word was usually used as a female name with an exception of one or two inscriptions among the available 10 gravestones. Since the word *Şaliba* / *Sliba* was written in the Aramaic language with the letter *sade* (ܣ 𐤒), scholars read this as “Saliba” with *sade* (ܣ 𐤒) in the Syriac language; in Turkic inscriptions, some scholars again read it as *sade*(s) and many others read it as /č/. For there is no such sound as *sade*(s) in Turkic, scholars who stated that this should be read as /č/ set up some rules concerning this word. According to P. K. Kokovcov, the letter *sade* ܣ in Syriac corresponds to /č/ and sometimes “c” in Turkic.<sup>24</sup> A similar set of rules has been stated by Klein,<sup>25</sup> Jumagulov,<sup>26</sup> R. Steiner<sup>27</sup> and M. Dickens: derived from Aramaic alphabet, according to Middle Persian, Sogdian and later Turkic alphabet, this *sade* letter (ܣ) in the Syriac word is equivalent to /č/ in Turkic.<sup>28</sup>

As a matter of fact, both Chwolson and V. Rybatzki did not mention *Saliba* while listing Turkic female and male names that occurred in the inscriptions.<sup>29</sup> Jumagulov read the letter *sade* as /č/ in one or two examples, whereas Chwolson always read it as *sade*. It seems like Chwolson changed the spelling of “Seliva” to “Zeliwa” in his new edition. At this point, it can be concluded that there is a problem concerning this word whether to read it as “saliba” or “čeliba”.

#### 4. The Words *Caelibā(tus)*, *Celibate*, *Celibacy* in Christianity

It is possible to see some words in Latin and in some modern European languages which are derived from this word and are similar to “čelebi” in Turkic in terms of meaning and form, such as, Latin “caelibā(tus)” (‘becoming not married, celibacy’),<sup>30</sup> and English “celibate”, “celibacy” (unmarried person due to

<sup>22</sup> CHWOLSON 1897, 34.

<sup>23</sup> KLEIN 2002, 218.

<sup>24</sup> KOKOVCOV 1907, 439.

<sup>25</sup> KLEIN 2000, 264.

<sup>26</sup> DJUMAGULOV 1971, 44. Jumagulov also states that the consonant “č” in Turkish gives a sound “š” in some cases.

<sup>27</sup> STEINER 1982, 56-57.

<sup>28</sup> HALBERTSMA & DICKENS 2018, 289; DICKENS 2016, 109. (Thanks to Dr. Dickens who kindly gave me information about this matter). Klein also pointed out there is no letter sound in Syriac corresponding to the Turkic consonant “č”. See KLEIN 2002, 220.

<sup>29</sup> See CHWOLSON 1890, 135-237; RYBATZKI 2004.

<sup>30</sup> OXFORD LATIN DICTIONARY 1968, 251. I. Z. Eyuboglu also seeks the origin of word “čelebi” to Lat. “caelebs” (‘who living alone, who did not marry’) (EYUBOGLU 1991, 137).

religious reasons especially’, ‘becoming celibacy’).<sup>31</sup> In Syriac it may be changed to S<sup>a</sup>liba / Ā<sup>a</sup>liba ܣܠܝܒܐ, meaning “cross, crucifix”.<sup>32</sup> C. Brockelmann, as he was explaining “saliba ܣܠܝܒܐ” (‘crux’) in his Syriac dictionary, referred to S. Fraenkel and stated that it derived from “čelīpā ܉ܠܝܦܐ” in Persian.<sup>33</sup> In Persian, “čelīpā” is an equivalent of “salīb” in Arabic, meaning “cross”.<sup>34</sup>

Through some influences and profound alteration of the Christian tradition in the West by St. Augustine of Hippo (AD 354-430) who was from Numidia and originally a believer of Manichaeism but later converted to Catholicism, Eastern Orthodox churches and other Church Fathers,<sup>35</sup> in traditions of the early Medieval Christianity there was the “celibacy” among the clergy and also practiced among the married couple, that is, to prevent themselves from any sexual intercourse.<sup>36</sup> Of course, in the early Syriac Church, celibacy was practiced as well.<sup>37</sup> However, in Syriac Christianity, it is clear that the term “saliba / čelipa” is directly related to celibacy, that is, a living in “the single one” (*iḥidāyā* ܝܚܝܕܝܐ).<sup>38</sup> Although, women’s marriage was a problematic subject particularly in Eastern Syriac Christianity, the marriage in the Syriac tradition, as stated in the *Bible*, was accepted as a sacred sign of the unity between Jesus and the Church (Eph. 5: 28-32). The Syriac Christians seemed to have a different practice of celibacy. That is to say, either both men and women vow (?) they would be baptized together or they would be baptized after they would have one or two children. During the course of the marriage, abstaining from sexual activities, they would have a kind of spiritual marriage which is called “*kaddiša*.”<sup>39</sup> Among the Nestorian Turkic tombstones in Central Asia mostly women used the name “saliba/čeliba”. This may suggest that Nestorian Turkic women would have had such celibate life-

<sup>31</sup> RANDOM HOUSE WEBSTER'S UNABRIDGED DICTIONARY 2001, 333.

<sup>32</sup> SMITH 1957, 478; COSTAZ 2002, 302.

<sup>33</sup> BROCKELMANN 1895, 303; FRAENKEL 1886, 276 (“Das Kreuz ܣܠܝܒܐ *Nâbiga 2, 10 ist bekanntlich durch Vermittelung des aramaischen ܣܠܝܒܐ aus pers. ܉ܠܝܦܐ entlehnt*”).

<sup>34</sup> SHUKÜN 1984, 717; STEINGASS 1930, 398.

<sup>35</sup> For influences by St. Augustine on Christian tradition in relation to marriage and celibacy, see ELLIOTT 1993, 43-50; HUNTER 2018, 173-215.

<sup>36</sup> In Western Christianity, the first canonical law about prohibiting the married clerics from sexual intercourse with their wives was seen in a Spanish council as early as in 306 (HUNTER 2007, 214). D. Elliott describes such marriage as “spiritual marriage” or “total sexual abstinence in wedlock” (ELLIOTT 1993, 17), and A. P. Alwis as “chaste marriage” and “celibate marriage” (ALWIS 2011, 10).

<sup>37</sup> For the practice of celibacy in the Early Syrian (especially East Syrian) Church, see Arthur Vööbus, *Celibacy: A Requirement for Admission to Baptism in the Early Syrian Church* (Papers of the Estonian Theological Society in Exile I), Stockholm 1951.

<sup>38</sup> Along with its another meaning (‘monk’) in Syriac, the word “*iḥidāyā*” ܝܚܝܕܝܐ is used in the meaning of “the single one” and “the only Begotten Son of the Father”, which points out that to imitate Christ is the best lifestyle (CUI Guoyu 2015, 200), and this also shows that the married couple should have no more than one child.

<sup>39</sup> HARVEY 2019 (<http://www.syriacstudies.com/2015/08/27/women-in-the-syriac-tradition-susan-ashbrook-harvey-2/>).

style. Besides, similar to the tradition in the Syriac society, the Turks having the title of “čelebi” in the early period of Anatolian Turkish history mostly had one child.

### 5. Origin and Meaning of the Word “Čelebi” in Turkic

“Čelebi” is a name or epithet given to people who originally were primary members of the Akhī order and later of the initiated Mawlawī order which can be seen firstly in the texts written in the 13<sup>th</sup> century Old Anatolian Turkic. Although usage of this word has not been seen except in Anatolia, “čelebi” can be found in one *mülemma*,<sup>40</sup> a type of poem of Qāsīm-i Envārī who was a Persian poet born in Tabriz and resided in Horasan and Herat in the 15<sup>th</sup> century under the Timurid rule. It also occurs in some texts written in Crimean Tatar and Chagatay Turkic as a personal name.<sup>41</sup> In the articles written about this in the early nineteenth and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the topic was always tackled within the framework of Anatolian geographic realm. Its usage by Qāsīm-i Envārī was the only example that transcended the word to the Iranian geographic realm from Anatolia.

Studies about the origin and meaning of the word “čelebi” (“well-mannered”) concentrate mostly on “čelebi” being a Turkish word together with putting emphasis on its meaning Kalliepis καλλιεπής in Greek and Sliba سَلِبَة in Syriac within the frame of Anatolia geography.<sup>42</sup> It seems that W. Barthold who wrote a good article on the subject “čelebi” in the *Encyclopedia of Islam* pointed out that the word is Turkish based on records of some Greek sources together with a summary of other views.<sup>43</sup> Baron Rozen who was influenced by Ahmed Vefik Pasha’s opinions looked for the origin of the word “čelebi” in Syriac (sliba سَلِبَة);<sup>44</sup> whereas Tiesenhausen searched its origin in Arabic (jeleb جلب ‘slave merchant’, jelīb جلب ‘slave’).<sup>45</sup> In fact, “jalab جَلَبٌ” in Arabic means ‘any merchandise brought to be sold’; “jalīb جَلِيبٌ” is a ‘male slave brought to the country of the Muslims [for sale] especially’; and “jallab جَلَّابٌ” is the ‘one who brings slaves from foreign countries, i.e. slave seller’.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, P.

<sup>40</sup> *Mülemma*: “the Turkish language, as being a mixture of Arabic, Persian, and Turkish; a poem, the hemistichs or distichs which are written in Persian and Arabic alternately, and which is allowable as far as ten distichs in each language” (STEINGASS 1930, 1310-1311).

<sup>41</sup> RASONYI & BASKI 2007, 189, 196.

<sup>42</sup> For a good summary about the origin of the word “Čelebi” see MARTINOVITCH 1934, 194-197.

<sup>43</sup> BARTHOLD & SPULER 1991, 19; BARTHOLD 1993, 369.

<sup>44</sup> ROZEN 1891, 305; ROZEN 1899, 311. Baron Rozen thought that this word transferred from Syriac to Arabic as “salīb صَلِيبٌ”.

<sup>45</sup> TIZENGAUZEN 1899, 308, fn.3, 310; ERDAL 1982 (1983), 411; DOERFER 1967, 91.

<sup>46</sup> LANE 1968, Part 2, 444, 446: “جَلَبٌ : things, such as camels, sheep, goats, horses, captives, or slaves, or any merchandise, from one place to another, or from one country or town to another, for the purpose of traffic; جَلَّابٌ: One who brings slaves from foreign countries, particularly from African countries, [for sale]; جَلِيبٌ : applied to a male slave, One who is brought from one place or country or town to another [for sale]: or one who is brought to the country of the Muslims [for sale]”

Melioranskiy states that the word “čelebi” is unfamiliar to Turkish and it is taken from abroad.<sup>47</sup> Baron Rozen thought that the Syriac word “saliba” (‘cross’) came from the Persian “čelīpā”, and this word was transferred from Persian to Turkish as “čelebi”, becoming corrupt.<sup>48</sup> A similar opinion was given by Vollers who gave some examples that words given with *sade* in Aramaic were pronounced with “č” in Persian and stated that the Syriac word “saliba” came from “čelīpā” in Persian.<sup>49</sup> Brockelmann pointed out “čelīpā” was a transcript of Syriac “saliba”. Moreover, Ahmed Vefik Pasha who had prepared one of the first and the most important dictionaries did not give any origin for the word “čelebi”; albeit, he explained that the words of “čelīpā” and “čalap” are the Christian cross (*jelep, čalap*) and God’s icons worshipped by the Uyghurs and that it was the name for God, which the East Turkish people gave when they were taught how to read by foreign priests in the time of Chinghis Khan (in the 13th century).<sup>50</sup> J. W. Redhouse also pointed out some meanings of the word “čelebi”, such as “religious person, Christian, crucifix, priest”, giving its various meanings.<sup>51</sup>

The word “čelebi” gained different meanings in the course of time in Ancient Anatolian Turkish.<sup>52</sup> Because Turkish people living in Anatolia in those times gave God the name “Čalap” generally by sūfī/religious Turkish poets. The word “čelebi” was explained associated with the word “čalap” and the final vowel *-i* at the end of the word is interpreted as Arabic *nisba* suffix; thus, it is expressed, according to P. Melioranskiy, as “God” in the meaning of “belong to Čalap, connected with Čalap” as in Yunus Emre’s poems and in Ancient Anatolian Turkish.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, two famous poets Yunus Emre (d. 1320?) and Hacı Bayrām-i Velī (d. 1430) used this word in the expression of “Čalabīm” and “čalab”, which clearly referred to God.<sup>54</sup> Additionally, Bahā’ al-Dīn Sultan Walad (1226-1312), who was one of the important sūfī poets in the 13th-14th

<sup>47</sup> MELIORANSKIY 1903, 04; BARTHOLD 1993, 370.

<sup>48</sup> ROZEN 1899, 311. For a relationship of the “Čelebi” to “salīb”, “čelīpā” in the meaning of “cross”, and also the word “Čalap” (‘God’) to a European Christian merchant, see again ERGIN 1977, 566, fn.3.

<sup>49</sup> VOLLERS 1896, 614; VOLLERS 1897, 307; TIZENGAUZEN 1899, 311.

<sup>50</sup> AHMET VEFİK PASHA 2000, 85, 582.

<sup>51</sup> REDHOUSE 1996, 728; ROZEN 1899, 312.

<sup>52</sup> For the main meanings of the word, see RASONYI & BASKI 2007, 196: “*Gentleman, host, landlord; educated man; götlich, ein Prinz vom Gebliit; Herr (Titel, Anrede eines Europäers); der Hausherr; der Schriftsteller, der Poet, der Gelehrte; gebildet, liebenswürdig, elegant*” and “*God-gave (him/her)*” for the personal name *Čalap-berdi* (p. 189).

<sup>53</sup> MANSUROĞLU 1955, 97; BARTHOLD 1993, 370; MELIORANSKIY 1903.

<sup>54</sup> For some examples in the refrain “Čalab’um” in the *Dīwān* of Yunus Emre and the subject “Čalab”, see GOLPINARLI 1965, 91-92; AYNİ 1343, 85; TATCHI 1998, 193-194, 342: “*Hak Čalab’um Hak Čalab’um sencileyin yok Čalab’um Günâhluyam yarlıgagıl iy rahmeti çok Čalab’um...*”; “*Čalab Tanrı’nun hâsı, Hazret’e geçer nâzı, Peygamber’ün ‘âmusu, Hamza pehlevân kani*”. See also the poem by Hacı Bayrām-i Velī, beginning with the word “Čalabum” BAYRAMOĞLU 1989, 231, Doc. No.149; CEBECIOĞLU 1991, 71,74-75,176: “*Čalabım bir şar yaratmış iki cihan aresinde, Bakıcak Dîdar görünür ol şarn kenâresinde*”.



centuries and who was the son of Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn of Rūmī often used the word “Çeleb/Çalab” along with the word “Tengri” in his Turkish poems.<sup>55</sup> It seems that this word “çelebi” had been used mostly for God in a lot of poems with the Turkish refrain “çelebi” of the *Dīwān* by Qādī Ahmed Burhān al-Dīn of Sivas, who wrote in Old Anatolian Turkish and who was a well-known sophistic poet at the end of the 14th century.<sup>56</sup> While “çelebi” was used for polite, high level people and notable members of Akhī community and Mawlawī order in the poetic and prose texts written in Anatolian Turkish from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15th century, after some time, it was also started to be used as a name or epithet for political people coming from the families connected to the Mawlawī order. After Ulu Ārif Çelebi who was the grandson of Mawlānā, people coming from his family were called as “çelebi” and the position representing Mawlānā was called as “çelebilik”<sup>57</sup> (kindness to inferiors, politeness). In addition to that for a while the word was used instead of “efendi (well-mannered)” in Turkish. In fact, along with the meaning of “scribe, secretary”, it was also used for some polite people coming from abroad.<sup>58</sup> For instance, Çelebi Husām al-Dīn who was one of the notables in Mawlawī order in the 13th century and a member of the Akhī community as well as sons and grandsons of Mawlānā were called “Çelebi” by sources of Mawlawī order.<sup>59</sup> Meanwhile, Ibn Battūta, the Arabic traveler also called some of Akhī sheikhs in the 14th century “Çelebi”, for example, the *Akhī Çelebī* in Sivas.<sup>60</sup>

However, all these given examples remained limited within the geographic extent of Anatolia. Qāsīm-i Envārī (1356-1433) who was a Persian poet and also wrote Turkish poems was called “Çelebi” in the Iranian realm.<sup>61</sup> The word “Çelebi” in Qāsīm-i Envārī’s poem “O Çelebi, do not forget us!” is interpreted as relating to the meaning of “God” (the beloved)<sup>62</sup> by various researchers or, as “Çelebi Efendi” (well-mannered master) referring Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn of Rūmī as the founder of Mawlawī order.<sup>63</sup> G. Meredith-Owens argues that Qāsīm-i Envārī’s

<sup>55</sup> MANSUROGLU 1958, 11, 16; DEGIRMENÇAY 2016, 617, 625.

<sup>56</sup> ERGIN 1980, 116,231-232; 258-259; 388; 428-429. Qādī Burhān al-Dīn Ahmed uses also the word “Çalap” in his *Dīwān*. For an example, a beginning couplet (*beyit*) in one of his poems with refrain “çelebi”:

“Niçe niçe yahulam ben tuzung ile çelebî,  
Güneşi isdemeyem ben yüziing ile çelebî”

<sup>57</sup> CHELEBI 1993, 261. J. Redhouse has translated the term “çelebilik” as ‘princedom, politeness, affability and kindness to inferiors’ (REDHOUSE, 1996, 728).

<sup>58</sup> For the general meaning of the word, see: BARTHOLD & SPULER 1991, 19; BARTHOLD 1993, 369-370; MANSUROGLU 1955, 97-98.

<sup>59</sup> See AHMED EFLĀKĪ 1986-1987; DEGIRMENÇAY 2016, 696; Index: Çelebi.

<sup>60</sup> IBN BATOUTAH 1877, 290-293.

<sup>61</sup> MEREDITH-OWENS 1962, 159-160.

<sup>62</sup> ZALEMAN 1907, xxxiii.

<sup>63</sup> BROWNE 1928, 479. Mawlānā’s son Sultan Walad wrote a poem with the refrain “çelebi bizi unutma” (‘O çalabī, don’t forget us’). It is generally accepted that this poem had been written

these kinds of poems show Chagatayid influence and also these poems are stated as so close to Azerbaijani Turkish.<sup>64</sup>

### 6. *Čelebi* as a Form of Address: *Mawla-nā*, *Tengri-m*, *Han-um*, *Beg-üm*

Another word related to “*Čelebi*” in terms of both meaning and spelling is “*mawlā*” (plural form “*mawālī*”). This word has been used for “an emancipated slave and captive” along with the meaning “slave master” (relationship between the words ‘*abd-‘ābid-ma‘būd*). According to the *Qur’an*, “*mawlā*” corresponds to “lord” which is used to designate Allah in Arabic literature. When Arabs use “*Mawlā-nā*”, it actually refers to Allah in the meaning of “Our Lord”.<sup>65</sup> In fact, since a believer accepted him/herself as being a slave, *mawla* of Allah, the expression of “*mawlā*” is used for designating “God”.<sup>66</sup> So the word “*Mawlā-nā*” with addition of Arabic first-personal pronoun may mean “Our Lord, Our Master, Our God”. It is very significant to see a usage of “*tengrim*” (my Lord, my Lady) (for instance *Ayçeçek tengrim*, *Amratmıř tengrim*, *Balaq tengrim*, *İqutatmıř tengrim*, *Küsemiř tengrim*, etc.) in some Turkic Uighur Buddhist texts.<sup>67</sup> In the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries Anatolia, there was a tendency to multiply the examples of Turkic words with Arabic first-personal pronoun –*i*. “*Akhī*” is another prominent example (e.g. *Akhī Ahmad*, *Akhī Čoban*, etc.), which can be certainly seen in the expression used by Ibn Battūta that this Turkic word means “my brother” in Arabic.<sup>68</sup> Fr. Taeschner gives three more Turkic examples formed identically in Turkic and stated by himself as “title in forms of address”: *seyyidī*, *hānum* and *begüm*.<sup>69</sup>

### 7. Celibacy/*Čelebilik*<sup>70</sup> in Anatolian *Akhī* and *Mawlawī* Orders of the 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Centuries

In Anatolia during the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was very likely to see a person with a title *Čelebi* in both the *Akhī* and *Mawlawī* orders. In the writings about both these people, especially in the work by *Mawlānā*’s grandson Ulu Ārif *Čelebi*, *Manāqib al-Ārifīn*, it was stated that among those with the title *čelebi*, some were married, and some were celibate. A good number of people were victims of forced marriages by their fathers, such as *Čelebi Husām al-Dīn*, but for the most part it can be seen that they were not able to visit their homes because they spent

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for *Čelebi Husām al-Dīn* (DEGIRMENÇAY 2016, 592-593, 750). See about its Persian text, SULTAN VELED 1941, 307.

<sup>64</sup> MEREDITH-OWENS 1962, 161; QĀSIM-E ENVĀR 1337, 408.

<sup>65</sup> WENSINCK 1991, 874.

<sup>66</sup> TOPALOĞLU 2004, 440; WENSINCK 1991, 874.

<sup>67</sup> RUBEN 1942, 182-183; ZIEME 1978, 73, 78-79; EROL 1992, 201; SUMER 1999, 79.

<sup>68</sup> IBN BATOUTAH 1877, 260; TAESCHNER 1953-1954, 18.


<sup>69</sup> TAESCHNER 1986, 321. For example, *Ayhanum*, *Gülbeden Bägüm* (EROL 1992, 44, 163). About these Turkish terms, see again PELLIOU 1930, 50.

<sup>70</sup> *Čelebilik*: kindness to Inferiors; politeness

so much time in the order.<sup>71</sup> Informing about the Akhī order in Anatolia and those who lived according to its rules, Ibn Battūta mentioned that they remained celibate as well.<sup>72</sup> In Anatolia, most prominent figures with the title *Čelebi* were the well-known Turkish traveler Evliya Čelebi and Turkish scholar Kātib Čelebi of the 17th century; the former never got married, and the latter had married and had a child. From information like this we can conclude that the *čelebis* at least at the beginning generally were celibate. Thus, *Slibas* / *čelibas* in Christianity were celibate as well. The meaning of “calibatum” in Latin and “celibate” or “celibacy” in English means to live in celibate.

### 8. *Jellāb* / *Jeleb* as a Central Asian Origin of “Čelebi” and Its Possible Relation with *Saliba* in Syriac

The opinion that “čelebi” in Turkic is actually derived from the Syriac word “Salib/Saliba” used by Nestorians is a very old one. However, because the usage of “čelebi” has not been evidenced in another Turkic dialect apart from the Anatolian geographic realm, its origin remained questionable. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in Yarkand about 15 documents concerning buying and selling deeds in Turkic Uighur and Arabic letters were found.<sup>73</sup> All of writings are about land-sale, and in one of the documents (dated to 474/1082 or 494/1101) which was published by scholars such as W. Barthold, Sh. Tekin, M. Erdal and M. Gronke has revealed the word (Ishāq al-Jallāb اسحق الجلاب) “jellāb” (Arabic: slave seller’, ‘slave dealer’) borrowed from Arabic that could potentially link the word “čelebi” to both Saliba / Čaliba on Nestorian gravestones and could present the meaning.<sup>74</sup> This person is mentioned in one undated documents among the Arabic ones which belonged to the Qarakhanid Turks and in three land-sale documents written in Turkic. He seemed to be a land buyer and a powerful person in his village.<sup>75</sup>

In the Turkic inscriptions written in Old Uyghur script dated to 473 / 1080 and 483 / 1090 published by Sh. Tekin and later M. Erdal, the relevant word appears as Hasan Čalap, son of Ismail, Muhammad Čalap, Ishak Čalap, Qalach Seli Čalap, Uzun Hasan Čalap can be read as “čalab 

<sup>71</sup> For Čelebi Husām al-Dīn, see AHMED EFLĀKĪ 1986-1987.


<sup>72</sup> IBN BATOUTAH 1877, 261; SARIKAYA 2002, 73.

<sup>73</sup> The originals of the documents were photographs which were taken by Sir D. Ross and then handed over to the SOAS Library are lost today. See BARTHOLD 1923, 158; TEKIN 1975, 158; ERDAL 1984, 261; GRONKE 1986, 454.

<sup>74</sup> BARTHOLD 1923, 157; ERDAL 1984, 264, 269, 272, 277, 281, 288-289.

<sup>75</sup> ERDAL 1984, 485-486.

<sup>76</sup> TEKIN 1975, 162-168, 171; ERDAL 1984, 288. The late Prof. Tekin rendered it as جالاب in the texts in Arabic letters arranged by him as transliteration.

giving various opinions about its origin, and maintaining that the word meant “God” of.<sup>77</sup> Erdal has read the word at the end of the names as “jellāb” in Arabic documents, but as “jel(l)eb ” in Turkic documents.<sup>78</sup> In some of the Turkic documents “jel(l)eb” represents a name of profession, but in some examples it is not an occupation name anymore.<sup>79</sup> Erdal sees the word as a general identification of the prominent figures in the society and compares it with the Uyghur word “bayagut”. The word “Bayat” or “beget” meaning “God” in Uyghur was changed to “Čelebi” with a possessive suffix *-i* in Ottoman Turkish, and it is very similar to “jellāb” in terms of meaning and usage. According to Erdal, the term “jellāb” played a role for the description of their new gods among the Muslim Turks because, according to the faith of Islam, the man who was seeing himself as a slave, was figuratively very much possible to see his god as “slave owner”, just like the word “lord” in Western languages and the word “κύριος *kurios*” in Greek showing a parallelism to “God”.<sup>80</sup> Erdal clarified this view in one of his works devoted only to this subject, and presented new examples. Accordingly, the Arabic word “jellāb” refers to “slave owner, slave dealer”. Tizengauzen believed that the surname “čelebi” or “jelebi” derived from the word “jeleb”, and that etymologically the word “jeleb” refers to *any received goods* and afterwards it became a name given to *foreigners* in general. Therefore, he speculated that “jelebi” is also a name given to foreigners.<sup>81</sup> Pointing out the relationship between the words “Jeleb” and “Jelebi” in both phonetics and meaning, Erdal stated that the word “čelebi”, with the meaning “slave owner, slave dealer”, shows the antiquity and centrality of its meaning in both Central Asia and Anatolia. Another important case pointed out by Erdal is that the final vowel *-i* at the end of the word “čelebi” is not an Arabic *nisba* suffix as it has been assumed, but actually the Arabic singular possessive suffix.<sup>82</sup>

As we mentioned above, among both Central Asian and Anatolian Turks the word *mawlā* corresponds to “slave”. In Islam, the believers accept themselves as slaves. The term “mawlā” began to be used for God in the form of “Mawlām” and “Mawlānā” with an ending *-nā*, first personal plural suffix in Arabic, became a surname of Rumi, i.e., Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn of Rūmī. Thereby a new term, *jellāb*,

<sup>77</sup> DOERFER 1967, 90-91.

<sup>78</sup> ERDAL 1984, 269, 272, 281, 287.

<sup>79</sup> For example, in the phrase of *Hasan jel(l)eb khattchī*, “jel(l)eb” does not seem to be a professional name because is followed by a word “khattchī” (‘scribe, writer’) which shows the profession of the person. See ERDAL 1984, 266, 287.

<sup>80</sup> LIDDELL & SCOTT 1996, 1013: “lord, master, head of a family; of gods, esp. in the East; of deified rulers, rulers in general; ὁ κύριος: emperor in Rome”. ERDAL 1984, 289: “Where the believer called himself *qul* ‘slave’, God could be the metaphorical slave merchant. The use of the word *ğallāb* in our texts makes the conceptual transition even better understandable’ ...;” fn. 58: “Lord and the Greek noun *kurios*, originally ‘lord, master, head of a family, master of a house’ are among the obvious parallels.”

<sup>81</sup> TIZENGAUZEN 1899, 308.

<sup>82</sup> ERDAL 1982 (1983), 412-413.

together with its variant form *jellābī* has been used for “My God” and figuratively “slave merchant”.<sup>83</sup> In the course of time, it began to be used for prominent, scholarly and religious figures of the society in Anatolia.

## 9. Conclusion.

The word *saliba* / *čelibā* on Nestorian gravestones inscriptions and its relation to the word *čelebi* are as follows:

9.1. The term “saliba” appears on only ten Syriac inscriptions among the Nestorian gravestones in Central Asia. It seems to be a name given generally to women and young girls, and it has not been found in Turkic inscriptions. Because the inscriptions are too short, it is hard to determine whether this is a personal name or it shows any feature of a relevant person, how the people obtained the name “saliba” and what was the relationship of this name to their religion.

9.2. Basically, representing “Cross, crucifix” in Christianity, the word “saliba” means “celibacy” or not getting married in both Latin and other European languages, especially for religious people. But in the context of 13<sup>th</sup> century Nestorian Turkic inscriptions, the word is directly related to those who bore a Turkic surname “Čelebi” and it had nothing to do with the people leading a celibate life and devoting themselves to the religion.

9.3. The Turkic word “čelebi” and allegedly its origin “čalap”, whether it derived from the Greek or Syriac in 13<sup>th</sup> century in Anatolia or from the Arabic and Persian, seems to be a word of foreign origin related to God, a religion and the sūfī orders in meaning. In terms of its word structure, the term “čelebī” originally just like the Arabic suffix– *i* in the word “Akhī” and in the same way as Turkic suffix – *m* in the word “tengrim” which is added to some personal names in Uyghur inscriptions, means “my Čalab, my God”, with an addition of Arabic first personal pronoun suffix. Due to various cultural environments and its connection with the crucifix in Christianity and with the religious people who worship the crucifix, “čelebī” has gained different meanings in time.

9.4. The word “čelebi” can also mean “slave” and “slave owner” – both literally and metaphorically – in Central Asia and in Turkic culture. It can be speculated that this meaning derived from the Arabic word “jeleb” or “jellāb”. In fact, the metaphorical usage of “mawlā” and thus “mawlānā”, meaning “the God” and the latter meaning “those who love the God” can be given as examples for this.

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<sup>83</sup> ERDAL 1982 (1983), 415.

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## SOME NOTES ON WEDDING RITUALS IN OLD UYGHUR AND OTTOMAN TURKISH

Peter Zieme

### **Introduction<sup>1</sup>**

Willi Heffening (1894 - 1944) who worked as a librarian at the university of Bonn had collected some Syriac materials. Here, I would like to present a manuscript of a wedding ritual. Beside a first analysis of the manuscript in Ottoman Turkish of the 19th century the text will be studied in comparison with an Old Uyghur wedding ritual known from Turfan which was composed and written around the 11th century.

First, I give an overview on the Old Uyghur text. The fragment belongs to the finds of the Turfan expeditions. Kurutka, the place of the wedding text lies in short distance from the monastery of Bulayık where the majority of Christian texts were found by the German team during their expeditions. From the first edition of a Syriac text of the Turfan finds in 1905<sup>2</sup> it took more than a hundred years that now most of the documents in Syriac script(s) in Syriac, Sogdian and Old Uyghur are edited finally.

### **The Wedding Ceremonial Text from Kurutka<sup>3</sup>**

At the beginning of the text, it appeals to those who were blessed by Abraham or to those who became perfect like father Jacob. Before an appeal to Joseph's beauty as the torch of the Christians, we see such an extremely strange expression as "mighty like the elephant of the creatures". It follows by a simile concerning the protection of the angels of heaven etc. The passage ends with the intention that all these qualities may settle on the new girl and the bridegroom. In some modern languages the same expression of "young girl" (*yaŋı kız*) instead of "bride" (*kälin*) is also used. But the bridegroom is called by the correct word *küdagü*. In the second section it is said that the angels should come and protect the new couple like the King of mountains dominates the water of the ocean!

A phrase on drinking wine is combined with a wish for the bridegroom that he may obtain powers like the heroes Yoshua bar Nun and Samson. The next passage

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<sup>1</sup> Herewith I would like to express my thanks to Marcel Erdal who read a draft and made valuable improvements, but for any shortcomings or mistakes I alone am responsible.

<sup>2</sup> SACHAU 1905.

<sup>3</sup> For details see ZIEME 2015a, text J.

uses similes that the bride and the bridegroom should accord to each other like creeper and tree, lute and fiddle, and cymbals and drums. A wish for everlasting happiness is connected with the wish of the well-being of the realm and the religion. Usually such a statement is the final phrase of a blessing, here a separate passage follows praising the bridegroom and wishing him manly powers in similes to animals and some other nature pictures such as a raging torrent or the waxing moon. The last phrase expresses the wish that the couple may live in harmony forever.

### The Ottoman Turkish Text

The four pages of So 182 (1)<sup>4</sup> are part of a ceremonial liturgy on the occasion of a wedding<sup>5</sup> for a small section in Garshuni Arabic, but for the greater part in Garshuni Turkish all are written in Serto script. The sequence of the leaves (a) to (d) is as follows. Judging from the mark on the left upper corner (÷) one can suppose that leaf (b) is the verso of (a) and (d) that of (c). But the prayer in Arabic Garshuni on leaf (c) ends on leaf (c) rather abruptly so that the presented sequence here remains admittedly doubtful. Vowel marks<sup>6</sup> are given only sporadically, a few examples imitating Arabic vowel marks are given here: اَ اِ اُ, اَ اِ اُ. The text here presented in a reading text with vowels when not written in round brackets has the following structure:

#### Passage 01<sup>7</sup>

##### Page (a): Line 01-09 - Introductory Prayer

Transcription:

- 01 c(e)lal(e)t(i)nle naz(a)r eyle. v(e) m(ü)bar(e)k  
 02 eyle bu qull(a)r(i)n ki ŝ(i)mdi bir  
 03 birini ahılar. ki bir birile  
 04 iŝt(i)ray<sup>8</sup> olal(a)r p(a)kc(i)kle<sup>9</sup> v(e) surpl(i)gla.

<sup>4</sup> Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Bonn, Abt. Handschriften und Rara: So 182 (1). I would like to express my gratitude to the Library for the permission to use these materials. For further information of the Heffening materials cp. ZIEME 2015b, 63.

<sup>5</sup> Wassilios Klein describes the leaves according to Numan Dag's notes as follows (19. April 2007): "Das erste Fragment, bestehend aus zwei Blättern ohne jeden Vermerk in lateinischer Schrift, enthält arabische und türkische Texte. Es handelt sich um Gebete für das Brautpaar. Es beginnt auf Türkisch, geht weiter auf Arabisch und endet auf der 4. Seite wieder auf Türkisch. Nach Aussage des Priesters [Numan Dag in Köln] passt die Schrift-Sprachkombination gut zur Region um Urfa (Edessa), wo man kein Syrisch mehr sprach, ggf. auch für Diyarbakir."

<sup>6</sup> For all questions of garshunography cp. KIRAZ 2012, esp. p. 79 sqq.

<sup>7</sup> See copies of the images at the end of this paper.

<sup>8</sup> Is "yŝtr'y" mistake for "iŝtirak"? The last letter has a *kesra* below, it is similar to the final "-k" in this manuscript. The spelling is dubious. M. Erdal also doubts the emendation.

<sup>9</sup> Written p<sup>a</sup>kc(i)k. The letter "g" can stand for "c", if a small circle is missing, thus we can read \*p(a)kc(i)k which does not exist in dictionaries, but it may be a derivative from *pāk* "pure" + suffix +*ck*. Another explanation: p<sup>a</sup>gk is a spelling mistake of p<sup>a</sup>kl or p<sup>a</sup>klg as we see it in c-04.

- 05 v(e) ol quv(ve)tli il(e)n v(e) üceli  
 06 qul(i)n s(e)r üz(e)rl(e)rine. v(e) h(a)z<sup>10</sup>  
 07 ile g(e)ndül(e)ri surp ad(i)nla  
 08 ki bir birile š(e)ri<sup>11</sup> old(u)qta.  
 09 s(e)n(i)n v(e)rgil(e)r(i)nd(e)n olşunl(a)r g(e)ndül(e)rd(e)n

Translation:

Look with your greatness and bless these your slaves who are taking each other (in marriage)! So that they, one with the other be together in pureness and holiness! And spread your powerful and exalted arm upon them. And when they are, with pleasure, partners with your holy name, they shall have it from your givings!

**Passage 02**<sup>12</sup>

Page (a): Line 10-17; (b): Line 01-14: Continuation with Prayer and Blessings

**Transcription:** Page (a), Line 10-17:

- 10 m(ü)bar(e)k uš(a)ql(a)r. v(e) ol g(e)ndül(e)ri  
 11 ile bile. n(e)če ki ev(e)ld(e)n abrah(i)m  
 12 v(e) sara ile bile<sup>13</sup>. iſh(a)q<sup>14</sup> r(a)pqa  
 13 ile bile. v(e) olşun g(e)ndül(e)rd(e)n r(ü)tb(e)t<sup>15</sup>  
 14 v(e) t(e)dbir s(a)h(i)bl(e)ri. y'(a)qub(i)n evl(e)nmesi  
 15 kimi. v(e) olşunl(a)r gögč(e)k<sup>16</sup> –  
 16 s(e)lvi kimi v(e) lay(i)q z(a)ytun kimi  
 17 mecdli m(e)yvel(e)r. v(e) olşunl(a)r

**Transcription:** Page (b), Line 01-14

- 01 musa kimi<sup>17</sup>. v(e) m(a)rḥ(a)m(a)tlı  
 02 olşunl(a)r d(a)vud kimi. h(a)kim  
 03 olşunl(a)r siliman<sup>18</sup> kimi.. .  
 04 sal(i)h<sup>19</sup> olşunl(a)r ayub kimi.  
 05 g(e)ribl(e)ri s(e)vs(i)nl(e)r abrah(i)m

---

This word stands in correlation in both instances to swrplg “holiness” and is derived from *pāk* “pure”: *p(a)kl(i)g* “purity”.

<sup>10</sup> حظ: “pleasure, delight” (REDHOUSE 2011, 468b).

<sup>11</sup> For *šerik* “partner” (REDHOUSE 2011, 1058a).

<sup>12</sup> See copies of the images at the end of this paper.

<sup>13</sup> Spelled bylh, but also byl', *ile bile* meaning “together”. M. Erdal adds that this compound is also usual in Iraqi Turkish.

<sup>14</sup> The scribe added the letter “w” afterwards.

<sup>15</sup> *Rütbe*: “rank”; *rütbetlü* is a title of the patriarch “Eminence”.

<sup>16</sup> *gökçek*: “pleasant”.

<sup>17</sup> *kimi* is the Azeri form of Republican Turkish *gibi* meaning “like”. Cp. MAJDA 2013, 218a (Turkish text in Latin script).

<sup>18</sup> *sylym'n*: syr. ślymwn, swlym'n, swlymn, slymn, in Old Uyğur there is Mar Šilimon, cp. ZIEME 2015a, 184.

<sup>19</sup> صالح.

- 06 kimi. v(e) oruč tut(a)l(a)r h(a)n(a)nya evi  
 07 kimi. v(e) d(a)nyail kimi. v(e) m(u)st(a)h(a)q  
 08 ile g(e)ndül(e)rini surp erkevütine  
 09 p(a)ulus kimi. v(e) saya k(i)zm(e)t  
 10 edel(e)r timataus kimi. v(e) olşun  
 11 p(a)kl(i)gleri sara kimi. v(e) m(ü)bar(e)k  
 12 olşunl(a)r r(a)pqa kimi. s(e)vg(i)li  
 13 olşunl(a)r raḥil kimi. q(u)vv(e)tli  
 14 olşunl(a)r š(a)muni kimi. ki  
 15 daiman šaz olal(a)r v(e) sevün(e)l(e)r  
 16 s(e)n(i)n k(e)yrat(i)nd(a)n<sup>20</sup> doyal(a)r. v(e) surp  
 17 ad(a)ya h(a)md v(e) pirk v(e) š(ü)kr vèrel(e)r

**Translation:**

(a 10-13):

The blessed youngsters, they themselves shall be altogether as it was from the beginning with Abraham and Sarah or with Isaac and Rebecca!

(a 13-15):

And from themselves they should be possessors of eminence and advice!

Like the marriage of Jakob!

(a 15-17, b01-04):

And they should be like a pleasant cypress and like a good olive that have rich fruits.<sup>21</sup>

They should be like Moses!

And they should be merciful like David!

They should be powerful like Solomon!

They should be just like Job!

(05-09):

They should love strangers like Abraham!

And they should keep the fasts like the house of Hananiah<sup>22</sup> and like Daniel!

And make them resolute to the holy Kingdom<sup>23</sup> like Paul!

(09-14):

And they should serve you like Timotheus!

<sup>20</sup> خيرات “Wohltaten” (German), “well-doings”.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Benjamin: “These rituals performed, the groom leads the veiled bride to her place of honor, a special chamber in the house called Beth Gnuna (the Bridal Chamber). A gaily-colored blanket (gnuna), symbolizing the home established through marriage, hangs behind the ‘throne’ (kursi d-malkutha) of the ‘king’ and ‘queen’. The so-called ‘royal tree’ (ilana d-khitna), decked with apples, pomegranates and quinces, stands nearby. The tree and its fruit are considered a symbol of peryutha (prosperity).”

<sup>22</sup> There was a certain Hananya ben Hizkiya ben Garon in the 1<sup>st</sup> cent. AD, who made a register of the fast days (TETZNER 1968, 32). But as Daniel is also mentioned as a symbol of fasting, it is more probable that Hananya is one of three young men who were in the furnace with Daniel, cf. ZIEME 2014, 345.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. ZIEME 2015, 81 fn. 163.

And their purity should be like Sarah!  
 And they should be blessed like Rebecca<sup>24</sup>!  
 They should be loved like Rahel!  
 They should be powerful like Simeon!  
 (14-17):

So that they should be happy forever and have joy! From your well-doings they shall be satiated! And they should give glory and gratitude to the holy \*father!<sup>25</sup>

**Comment**

The young couple is addressed as *uṣaqlar* “children” usually denoting only male persons. Here, they are the bride and the groom. They are first compared to the famous biblical couples of Abraham and Sarah or Isaac and Rebecca. Surprisingly, the next simile concerns the marriage of Jacob, but without mentioning the names of his wives.

And with the same *kimi* “like”, there follows a long series of similes. The comparison of the future couple with a cypress and an olive tree can be interpreted as a comparison of the groom with the cypress, while the olive tree symbolizes the bride.<sup>26</sup>

In the subsequent list of similes no distinction is made between bride and groom by using “they” in plural form. In the following list the figures of comparison known from the Holy Scripture are enumerated:

Biblical figures (Ottoman text)		Biblical figures (Old Uyghur text)	
Moses			
David			
Solomon			
Job			
Abraham & Sarah		Abraham	
Isaac & Rebecca			
Jacob		Jacob	

<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting the spelling of Rebecca. In both Garshuni passages (Ottoman and Arabic) the name is spelled rpq’ (a 12, b 12, c15) like in Syriac (ܪܦܩܐ: Rapqa).

<sup>25</sup> The spelling is ܪܦܩܐ. M. Erdal reminds me of the Hebrew word *eda* “community”. On the other hand, one can think of a Syriac word for “father”. Maclean 1901, 3b has ܪܦܩܐ *ada* “daddy”, but this is only an ad hoc solution. Further research is necessary.

<sup>26</sup> The most famous example is Mary known under her title “Olive Tree of the Father’s Compassion” (BUONO 2008, 298).

		Joseph	
Hananya's house = family			
Daniel			
Paul			
Timotheus			
	Sarah		
	Rebecca		
	Rahel		
Simeon		Simeon and Joshua Bar Nun	
Isaac & Rebecca (couple) in the Arabic prayer			

“Together” or “with” is expressed by *ile* “with” or by *+IA* in most cases. In three examples we see the addition of *bile* “together”, but obviously restricted to the case where the couples are mentioned. For example, in (a) 10-13: *v(e) ol g(e)ndül(e)r*; 11: *ile bil. n(e)ce ki ev(e)ld(e)n abrah(i)m*; 12: *v(e) sara ile bile. ish(a)q v(e) r(a)pqa*, and 13: *ile bile*.

### Passage 03

#### Page (c) 01-07 Words of the Priest

#### Transcription:

- 01 k(a)hna y(e)did(e)n<sup>27</sup> s(e)n(i)n p(a)riħa. n(e)če  
 02 ki surp erenl(e)r(i)n y(e)d(i)nd(e)n aldıl(a)r.  
 03 olşun daima can surpl(i)gı  
 04 v(e) m(a)rmin p(a)kl(i)gi. sevünm(e)g ile  
 05 p(i)rk v(e) š(ü)kr v(e)res(i)n ataya v(e) ortine  
 06 v(e) hoki surpa ebed aleb(e)dinet(i)k::  
 07 amin.. n(a)maz g(ü)v(e)gi v(e) g(e)lin üzerene<sup>28</sup>

#### Translation: c 01-07

Your blessing is from the hand of priests as they received it from the hand of the holy men. Forever shall be the holiness of the soul, the purity of the members! With joy one shall give glory and gratitude to the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost for ever and ever! Amen! Prayer for bridegroom and bride.

<sup>27</sup> From Syr. or Arab. *yad* “hand”.

<sup>28</sup> The words after *amin* are written in red.

**Comment**

In c 01 the spelling *pryh*’ can be best explained as Syr. بركه *bryk*’ “blessing” (√ *brk*).

**Passage 04**Page (c) 08-17 Prayer in Arabic

The last line 03 (c 07) concludes with a header in red for the subsequent section “Prayer over bridegroom and bride”. This *namaz* “prayer” is written in Arabic Garshuni. (Here, this text is not edited.)

**Passage 05**Page (d) 01-15

Considering the script, one has to admit a big difference from the type used before. The letters are drawn not as bold as those in the other leaves, and the size of the letter seems to be smaller, too.

**Transcription:**

- ∴ 01 imdi ya m(ü)bar(e)k uš(a)ql(a)r(i)m s(i)zi bir birin(i)ze  
 02 t(e)sl(i)m v(e) sizi allaha t(e)sl(i)m ett(i)m. allah  
 03 v(e)kil olsun b(e)n ile v(e) siz(i)n aran(i)zda. h(e)r ne ki  
 04 size s(i)par(i)š v(e) t(e)nbih ett(i)m vac(i)bd(i)r ki t(e)kmil  
 05 ile h(a)fz êdes(i)nün<sup>29</sup>. eg(e)rki dutam(a)s(i)nuz b(e)n  
 06 s(i)zin g(ü)n(a)h(i)n(ı)zd(a)n irag olur(u)m q(i)yam(a)t g(ü)n(i)nde  
 07 c(e)vab(i)nı v(ê)rirs(i)nüz v(e) lak(i)n rica êd(e)rüz ep(e)ndim(i)z  
 08 isus krisdusd(a)n ki g(e)ndün(i)n r(a)hmatını  
 09 v(e) n’(i)m(e)t(i)ni v(e) b(e)r(e)ket(i)ni üzerin(i)ze y(a)gd(i)rs(u)n. v(e)  
 size  
 10 cümle h(a)tan(i)n š(e)rl(e)r(i)nd(e)n. qurt(a)rsun. v(e) köti  
 ‘(a)m(i)l(la)rd(a)n  
 11 irag eyles(ü)n. v(e) sal(i)h’(a)m(i)l(la)r ile sizi b(ê)z(etsün  
 12 katun surp m(a)ryam anan(i)n š(a)f’atıla v(e) c(ü)mle { ... }  
 13 p(e)ygamb(a)rl(a)r(i)n<sup>30</sup>. erenler(i)n v(e) š(e)hidl(e)r(i)n v(e)  
 m(a)rdirosl(a)r(i)n  
 14 n(a)mazile v(e) du’(a)l(a)r ile p(i)rk olusun<sup>31</sup> allah(i)n  
 15 adına eb(e)d aleb(e)dinet(i)k<sup>32</sup> amin

**Translation: (d 01-15)**

Now, my blessed young children! I have given you one to the other, and I have given you over to God. God be the advocate between me and you. Everything that I have ordered and proclaimed is necessary that you should remember it with perfection. If you cannot keep it, I am far from your sins. On the Day of

<sup>29</sup> ‘yd’swn is a mistake for ‘yd’snwz.

<sup>30</sup> First letter is “b” with three dots below.

<sup>31</sup> Read *olsun!*

<sup>32</sup> ‘bd’l’bdyn’y with a *kesra* below “y”. This is similar to a final “-k” which should stand here.



Resurrection, you must answer, but we ask our Lord Jesus Christ to spend His own mercy and blessings and good fortune upon you and to free you all from the evils of sin and keep you away from bad deeds. And decorate you with righteous deeds. With the splendour of the Lady, the Holy Mother Mary, and with the prayer and invocations of all prophets, (holy) men, witnesses, and the martyrs may glory be! In the name of God. For all eternity, Amen!

### Conclusion

The four pages are part of a ceremonial liturgy on the occasion of a wedding. The sequence of the leaves is not fixed. Judging from the mark on the left upper corner (∴) one can suppose that leaf (b) is the verso of (a) and (d) that of (c). But the prayer in Arabic Garshuni ends on leaf (c) rather abruptly so that the presented sequence here remains admittedly doubtful.

The language of this text as others from the collection of Bonn is Ottoman Turkish with some Azeri features. The lexicon contains Armenian words as well as Syriac or Arabic borrowings. Among the latter ones there is also the common noun  $\text{ܝܳܕ}$  *yad* “hand”.

In addition to the tableau of the persons in these blessing texts one should mention that the same persons are quoted in Syriac wedding rituals described in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “He who blessed Abraham the righteous, and who saved Isaac, be with us and amongst us. The EL whom the chaste Jacob saw, may He with His right hand bless our assembly. The Lord who was with Joseph preserve our goings. The mighty God whom Moses saw be with us at all times.”<sup>33</sup> Or: “... As Thou didst to Abraham and the chaste Sarah his wife, In the beginning, that they may be strong in faith and in virtuous living; That like Isaac and Rebecca his wife, they may be saved by doing of good deeds; That like Jacob the father of the tribes they may be fruitful in procreation”.<sup>34</sup>

The marriage is a sacramental ceremony in the Church of the East. Although there is no information about how the text was used, one can imagine that this blessing text was possibly presented after the ceremony in the church.

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<sup>33</sup> BADGER 1852, II, 249.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 250.

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## TIMOTHY AS SPONSOR OF THE ASIA MISSION

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The Catholicos-Patriarch Timothy I (727/8-823) is one of the greatest personalities of the Church of the East<sup>1</sup> In his long time, almost 45 years in office, he led the church through turbulent times and carried out many reforms. His activity concerned both the promotion of the formation of the clergy and the regulation of the conduct of the bishops in his jurisdiction. He was personally involved in the translation of Greek literature often with Syriac as an intermediate language into Arabic. In two letters he reported on his longer discussions with Muslims, one with the caliph al-Mahdi, with whom he was befriended, the other with a Muslim philosopher. He moved the seat of the Catholicos from Seleucid-Ctesiphon to Baghdad. In his time the Church of the East expanded widely. There were bishops in Damascus as well as in China and India. I cannot pursue his various activities and tasks here. In the following, the paper will deal with missions in Central Asia, especially in the Region of the Caspian Sea at the time of the Patriarchate of Timothy I, and the regulations Timothy implemented for the dioceses in the mission area.

Timothy is regarded as the Catholicos under whom the mission of the Church of the East flourished in the Far East particularly well. Accordingly, one could expect his letters to contain a lot of information about these dioceses and missions. It should be noted, however, that many of his letters are lost today. Contemporary reports can supplement this information in the letters.

### **Mention of Countries and Peoples in the Letters**

In his letters Timothy mentioned different cities, regions and countries. These described a part of the earth circle known to him. However, a large part of his letters are lost today, therefore, we cannot assume that his knowledge was not limited to these countries and regions, apart from the fact that Timothy did not necessarily mention all the regions he knew in his correspondence.

Timothy I gave the geographically most comprehensive description of the extension of the Patriarchate of the Church of the East in his letter to the monks

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<sup>1</sup> See: BUNDY in BROCK ET AL 2011., s.v. "Timotheos I," ; SUERMANN in KLEIN-KOHLHAMMER 2004., 152–67; BIDAWID 1956; HEIMGARTNER 2012, 2016 & 2019; BRAUN 1953.

from Mār Māron. This letter is about witnesses for the missing addition ‘crucified for us’ in the Trisagion. Timothy wrote concerning the East: “For behold, in all the provinces — in Babylonia, in Persia, in Assur, and in all the provinces of the East, and in Bet-Hindūyē, in Bet-Sīnūyē, in Bet-Tuptūyē, and in Bet-Turkūyē, and in all the citizenries subject to this patriarchal throne, whose servants and subjects God has commanded to be — this hymn is recited since eternity in many different places and among [many different] peoples and in [many different] languages without the addition ‘you who were crucified for our sake’, from which it is recognizable that this hymn from above (denotes) a composite individuality.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, Timothy drew a large area in the East, which was both known by name to him and belonged to his ecclesiastical jurisdiction. These areas were not only nominally subordinate to him, but also, according to his own statements, inhabited by Christians who followed the same liturgical tradition as was customary at the seat of the Patriarchate. Of the countries mentioned here, there are numerous testimonies of Christianity in China.<sup>3</sup> In India there are still Christian churches today, which trace their origins back to the Apostolic period.<sup>4</sup> In other regions, such as Central Asia, there are few archaeological remains or better only a few are known. Of the peoples mentioned in the letter, the Turks are of particular interest here. Turkic tribes had migrated to Transoxiana at that time.<sup>5</sup> The conversion of individual tribes to Christianity must have taken place before the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Tribes following the Church of the East between Oxus and Balkash Lake maintained the Christian faith from the 7<sup>th</sup>/8<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century despite the Islamic rule.<sup>6</sup> In the letter to Mār Māron Timothy wrote that a Turkish king with all his subjects wanted to become<sup>7</sup> Christian.<sup>8</sup> In another letter (no. 47) to Rabban Sergius, Timothy wrote that he had ordained a bishop for the Turks and was preparing to consecrate a bishop for the Tibetans.<sup>9</sup> The following discusses four other bishops and their missionary methods.

<sup>2</sup> For the German translation, see: HEIMGARTNER 2019, 96, 127. English translation by current author. A different, older edition by BIDAWID 1956, 117, ٤٧.

<sup>3</sup> See; TAKAHASHI in BROCK ET AL 2011; GILLMAN-KLIMKEIT 2013, 265–305, s.v. ‘Christians in China’.

<sup>4</sup> GILLMAN-KLIMKEIT 2013, 155–203, s.v. ‘Christians in India’; Brock in Brock et al 2011, s.v. ‘Thomas Christians’.

<sup>5</sup> For the different tribes and their presence in this region see: DICKENS 2010, 123–30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., DICKENS 2004. <http://www.suryaniler.com/makalehavuzu/makale17.pdf>; DICKENS in BORBONE-MARSONE 2015, 5–39.

<sup>7</sup> BERTI in JULLIEN 2011, 74. Berti prefers to translate ܡܫܝܚܝܘܬܐ with “familiarized” instead of “converted”.

<sup>8</sup> HEIMGARTNER 2019, 144; 108–109. BIDAWID, 124. ٤٧.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 2012, 71 & 86.

## Metropolitan Šūbhālīšō<sup>‘</sup>

Thomas, bishop of Margā, living in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, wrote a history of the monastic life, known as Book of the Governors.<sup>10</sup> The first bishop Patriarch Timothy I sent to the region of Dailam<sup>11</sup> was a monk of the monastery of Beth ‘Abe, whom he appointed to be bishop. His name was Šūbhālīšō<sup>‘</sup>. Presupposition for this choice was that he knew Syriac, Arabic and Persian.<sup>12</sup> The region to which he was sent as a bishop was inhabited by “barbarian nations, who never received the bridle of the teaching concerning God, and into whose country none of the preachers and evangelists of the kingdom of heaven had gone since the time of the Apostles until the present.”<sup>13</sup> Later it is reported that he did mission among countries which abounded in sorcery, idolatry and all corrupt and abominable practices.<sup>14</sup>

It is exaggerated that in the region no Christians had done mission. Already Bardaisanes of Edessa noticed around 196 AD that Christians lived there,<sup>15</sup> stating that there lived pagans as well.<sup>16</sup> A Synod in 544 AD under Joseph, Patriarch of the Church of the East, mentions a bishop of Āmol and Gilān attesting the synod by letter and seal.<sup>17</sup> Yoḥannan of Dailam, who died in 738 AD, was also a monk from the monastery of Beth ‘Abe. It was reported that he was taken prisoner to Dailam and after being freed had converted many pagans in the region.<sup>18</sup>

When the people heard that Šūbhālīšō<sup>‘</sup> had to convert those countries,<sup>19</sup> leaders and believers gave him much money and the necessary clothing during his ordination, before he was sent to these countries.<sup>20</sup> The necessary clothing may indicate the required provision for a metropolitan. Disciples accompanied him. Money was needed for the journey for the whole group.<sup>21</sup> But it was also said that the prestigious clothing was necessary for the conversion, as the barbarian nations were attracted by worldly pomp. For the people, to whom the

<sup>10</sup> See: WITAKOWSKI in Brock 2011, s.v. “Toma of Marga”; BERTI 2006, 87–104.

<sup>11</sup> Delum, Dailum or Dailōmāye is the mountainous area northeast of it. The diocese of Dailum was united with the Diocese of Gilam. Gilam or Gilāye is the country near the Caspian Sea from the Russian border to Resht.

<sup>12</sup> BUDGE, trans., 1893, vol. 1, 260 & vol. 2, 479.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Vol. 2, 479; vol. 1, 260.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 489; vol.1, 266.

<sup>15</sup> GRAFFIN 1907, 606–8; DRIJVERS 2007, 60.

<sup>16</sup> GRAFFIN 1907, T. 2, T. 2, 586–88.

<sup>17</sup> CHABOT 1902, 109; 366.

<sup>18</sup> BROCK in BROCK ET AL 2011, s.v. “Yoḥannan of Dailam”; DRIJVERS 2007, 61.

<sup>19</sup> BUDGE 1893, vol. 2, 480. Budge translates “he had undertaken the conversion of those countries.”

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., vol. 2, 480 & vol. 1, 261.

<sup>21</sup> BERTI 2006, 83.92-93.



metropolitan was sent, they may have already viewed the official provision for a metropolitan as worldly pomp. This facilitated — according to the text — the conversion. This indicates that conversion increased the social prestige and the converted enhanced his social capital, and the status of its political capital.

The missionary work consisted of preaching accompanied by miracles. The bishop baptized the inhabitants and built churches. He ordained priests and deacons from among them, that means from the local people.<sup>22</sup> Thus, he established the local clergy. Once Šūbhālīšō‘ had implanted the local church by going “further into the country, until the ends of the East”: there he met not only heathen, but also Marcionites<sup>23</sup> and Manichees.

The missionaries preached to the people and “planted in them the light of truth of the Good News of our Lord, and plucked from the simple souls what there were all the despicable thorns and seeds of evil deeds which Satan had sown in their hearts. And they taught and baptized, and they performed mighty deeds and produced wonderful works, and the rumor of their deeds was brought to all the ends of the East.”<sup>24</sup> The report lists the stages of the mission: preaching, changing customs and traditions – this is probably meant by plucking out the thorns and seeds of evil deeds – teaching, baptism and miracles or great works. These are the essential elements of mission: word proclamation, evangelical social change, church planting and church formation. However, the text does not provide any information on how the individual elements were implemented in practice. However, conclusions can be drawn from the description of the religious situation in the region.

After a while, probably when Šūbhālīšō‘ was old, he wanted to return to ‘his’ monastery of Beth ‘Abe.<sup>25</sup> It seems to be a custom for the former monks to return to their monastery of origin. But Šūbhālīšō‘ was not able to return as he was murdered. The reason that is given for the murder is that Christianity won over the old religion and “that the fire-temples and the fire-alters were pulled down.”<sup>26</sup> The ‘pagan religion’ seems to be the Zoroastrianism, which lost its strength with the fall of the Sassanid Empire. The strength of Christian missions obviously challenged the remaining adherents. A few pages earlier in the *Book of Governors* we find a further description of the ‘pagan’ religion: “they had not even received the knowledge of God, the Creator of the worlds and their Governor, like the Jews and other nations, but they offered, and behold they [still] offer, worship to trees, graven images of wood, four-footed

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<sup>22</sup> BUDGE 1893, 2:481; 1:261.

<sup>23</sup> It is interesting that Marcionites were mentioned to exist in that time and region. See: VAN ROMPAY in BROCK ET AL 2011, s.v. “Marcion,” Berti 2006, 93–94.

<sup>24</sup> BUDGE 1893, 2:468; 2:253.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:483–84; 1:262.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:484; 1:262.

beasts, fishes, reptiles, birds of prey, and [other] birds, and such like things, and they bow down to worship fire and the stars and planets.”<sup>27</sup> Elements of this description like ‘worship of fire’ seem to fit Zoroastrianism, others like worship of birds, reptiles fit more Yazidism, the worship of stars and planets points to Astrolatry. It seems that different religions and cults are subsumed under ‘pagan’ religion and distinguished from monotheistic religion like Judaism and Islam. Dailam and Gilan were in the time of Timothy I a nearly independent state and not conquered by Muslim troops.<sup>28</sup> In this area Zoroastrianism and Marcionism and probably other cults could survive, while Manichaeism had been a major religion in the region.

### **Mār Yāhballāhā, Qardāg and Mār Elijah**

With the end of the episcopate of Šūbhālīšō ‘ and his death Patriarch Timothy had to appoint new bishops for the region. According to Thomas of Margā Timothy had sent three men, Mār Yāhballāhā, Qardāg and Mār Elijah, to the countries of Dailōmāye and Gīlāye to proclaim the Gospel there.<sup>29</sup> They were to continue the work of Šūbhālīšō ‘. According to the *Book of Governors* these events could be inferred from letters written to Timothy by merchants and royal writers from these countries:<sup>30</sup> “And thou mayest learn clearly concerning all these things from the letters<sup>31</sup> which certain merchants and kings’<sup>32</sup> scribes, who were going in and coming out from those countries for the purposes of trade and the business of the government, wrote to Mār Timothy”. The information about the evangelization activities stems from the letters sent to Timothy and written by certain merchants and kings’ scribes. The text clearly says “wrote”, but not one single letter of a merchant or a royal scribe written to Timothy or written by Timothy to them is known, beside the information that Timothy was in correspondence with the King of the Turks.<sup>33</sup> Thomas von Margā on the other hand clearly said that they did not come on religious purpose, e.g. to ask for a new bishop, but for trade and state affairs. It must be understood that they only delivered the letters. The postal system functioned thanks to the two groups. We do not know who were the senders of the letters. It is very likely that they were the bishops who had to report to the patriarch.

Yāhballāhā and Qardāg both from the Beth ‘Abe were brothers. They succeeded Šūbhālīšō ‘ as metropolitans, however the diocese was divided. Yāhballāhā became metropolitan of Dailōmāye and Qardāg of Gīlāye. Fifteen monks from

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 2:468; 1:253.

<sup>28</sup> MINORSKY in BEARMAN ET AL 2012, s.v. “Daylam”; Spuler in BEARMAN ET AL 2012, s.v. “Gīlān”.

<sup>29</sup> BUDGE 1893, 2:467; 1:252.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 2:468–69; 1:253.

<sup>31</sup> In the English translation of Budge: “letter” (singular).

<sup>32</sup> In the English translation of Budge: “king’s” (singular)

<sup>33</sup> See below.

the monastery Beth ʿAbe accompanied them to their mission dioceses and seven of them were appointed bishops beyond Gilan and Dailom.<sup>34</sup> They became bishops in the missionary areas of the two metropolitans and most probably they were suffragan bishops to the metropolitan. However, we do not have any information about these dioceses.

The region where they did their mission was regarded as “uncivilized”: “those barbarian nations of daring thieves, and plunderers, and worshippers of devils turn from their polluted religions, which were established without the labour of fasting and prayer, and despise the customary acts of the service of hateful things”<sup>35</sup> and “that uncultivated country”.<sup>36</sup> The result of their mission was not only the planting of a church, but also the civilization of the people, which consisted of course of a Christian culture: the missionaries established the fasting and prayer, the vigil by nights, abstinence from food on stated fasts and holy festivals. They taught, baptized and sanctified them. Thus, it was not only a religious mission but also a civilizing mission.

### **Elija, Bishop of Mōqān**

Elija was a monk in the monastery of Beth ʿAbe, before he was chosen as bishop of Mōqān, north of Dailom.<sup>37</sup> The inhabitants there were said to be barbarians worshiping dumb animals. No Arabs, that means Muslims, and neither Jews, were in the town.<sup>38</sup> When the inhabitants converted to Christianity, they said that the fathers had worshiped Yazd. But this is not the name of a specific god but a Middle Persian and Parthian word for god.<sup>39</sup> Thus, it does not indicate any religion. An object of veneration was an oak tree.<sup>40</sup>

Elija was ordained by the metropolitan of Adiabene in his monastery Beth ʿAbe and after that he went to the Catholicos Timothy I to be confirmed. He was sent to his diocese with certain merchants who were going in the countries where Mōqān was situated. On the way he had to heal a mule of one of the merchants.<sup>41</sup> During his travels he never sat upon a mule, but walked on his feet.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> BUDGE 1893, 2:490–91; 2:266–67.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:492; 1:268.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:494; 1:270.

<sup>37</sup> MINORSKY in MINORSKY ET AL. 2012, s.v. “Mukan” .

<sup>38</sup> BUDGE, 1893, 2:505–509; 1:278–281.

<sup>39</sup> SHAYEGAN 1998, 31.

<sup>40</sup> BUDGE 1893, 2:511; 1:283–84.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:506–7; 1:279–81.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:516; 2:287.

Concerning the inhabitants of the region nothing new was said. They were “barbarians who were remote from all understanding and a decent manner of life”. If Timothy sent Elija to this region it was not only to change the religion but also to bring a better life to the people. The religious mission included also a civilizing mission.

That the new bishop had to be confirmed by the patriarch is the normal procedure for those who are not ordained in an external diocese.<sup>43</sup> Monks and bishops had to travel with merchant caravans in order to profit from their protection. They may have to change the company during the way. It is not sure that the merchant company would be a Christian one. It is probably that they were mixed or different groups did go together on their way. The monks and bishops profited from the security measures of the caravan. What was the *quid pro quo* the bishops and monks had to provide? It was the spiritual assistance and in cases as told here the healing service. Bishops and monks could give also a supernatural protection.

Arriving in Mōqān, Elija preached the gospel. But it was only after the healing of a deadly sickness did the people convert to Christianity. They renounced worshiping ‘Yazd’, and Elija cut down the venerated oak tree.<sup>44</sup> After destruction of the old place of veneration, they build a church and Elija baptized them and taught them the doctrine and the rites. Finally, he ordained priests and deacons, thus establishing a local church.<sup>45</sup> Afterward he returned to his monastery narrating the conversion.

### **The Conversion of the Turks**

According to the information given by Mari ibn Sulaymān, Timothy had converted the king of the Turks and other kings to Christianity and was in correspondence with them teaching them the Christian doctrine.<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, all these letters are lost. In the letter to Mār Māron, Timothy reports — as already mentioned<sup>47</sup> — that in his tenth or thirteenth year of reign, the king of the Turks wanted to convert with his entourage to Christianity and asked him for a metropolitan. The metropolitan was granted to him. The conversion of Turks under Timothy was not the first and nor the last one. Several times conversions of the Turks to Christianity are reported in Syriac literature and there were probably three conversion movements. The first conversion is dated in the *Chronicle of Khuzistan* to the middle of the 7<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See below.

<sup>44</sup> BUDGE 1893, 2:511–12; 1:284.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:512–13; 1:285.

<sup>46</sup> GISMONTI 1899, 64 (Latin); 73 (Arabic).

<sup>47</sup> HEIMGARTNER 2019, 144; 108–9.

century.<sup>48</sup> The next conversion was under the patriarch Timothy. Mari ibn Sulaymān in his *Kitāb al Mağdal* (Book of the Tower, 1214)<sup>49</sup> and Barhebräus in his *Chronicon Ecclesiasticum* (1286)<sup>50</sup> dated a third conversion to the year 1007/08.<sup>51</sup> While in the first two conversion records the Turkic tribes are not known by name, but the name of the Turkish tribe is mentioned in the third. It was the Keraïtes.<sup>52</sup> Dickens tries to determinate the tribe which could have been converted during the patriarchate of Timothy I. He considers also the political reasons for the conversion of the king with his tribe. Though we do not have a written statement of reason for the conversion, it could be that by the conversion to Christianity the king could strengthen his political position and his independency in front of other Turkic tribes which converted to another major religion, that is, Manichaeism or Judaism. At the same time the king would have kept his independence from the neighboring state with Islam as their state religion.<sup>53</sup>

After conversion the king asked for a metropolitan, which was granted. The location of the metropolitan seat, however, is controversial in scientific literature: on the banks of the Syr-Darya, east of the Aral Sea, or Samarkand? Or was there no permanent seat, but only wandering bishop in the court?<sup>54</sup> The metropolitanate Samarkand was nearby. According to Ibn at-Ṭayyib (†1043), the Samarkand metropolitanate was founded under one of the three patriarchs with the name Īšō‘yahb in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, or under Šlibā-Zkhā (714-728), some traditions say that it was founded even earlier.<sup>55</sup> The metropolitanate of Samarkand was not acceptable to the Turkic king as it was situated in a Muslim region. It must have been a metropolitan in his territory.<sup>56</sup> Whether this metropolitan had a fixed seat in a town or was peripatetic, moving with the court, is unknown.

The letter mentions that the king wanted to appoint a metropolitan. Had the negotiations with the King taken too long? Or did he not want a metropolitan residing in Samarkand under Muslim rule?<sup>57</sup> We do not know the answer. The mission of Timothy I was to negotiate with a king of a tribe with a ‘pagan’ religion. It was the king who asked for the conversion of his entire tribe. The

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<sup>48</sup> GUIDI 1891, 3–36, here 34–35; DICKENS 2010, 121–22.

<sup>49</sup> GISMONTI 1899, 64 (Latin) 73 (Arabic); 99–100 (Latin), 112–113 (Arabic); Concerning the date of the chronicle, see: LANDRON, 1994, 99–108.

<sup>50</sup> LAMY & ABBELOS 1872, 279–82.

<sup>51</sup> Concerning this conversion, see: DICKENS 2010, 122.

<sup>52</sup> DICKENS 2010, 122.

<sup>53</sup> DICKENS 2015, 130–32.

<sup>54</sup> BERTI 2006, 122–23; DICKENS 2010, 123–24.

<sup>55</sup> HUNTER 1992, 366–67; DICKENS 2010, 123. It seems to him that a seventh or eighth century is more plausible.

<sup>56</sup> DICKENS 2004, 131.

<sup>57</sup> FIEY 1993, 128. He placed the seat of the metropolitan at Samarkand. DAUVILLIER 1948, 285.

conversion to Christianity was a political issue. Timothy was the right contact person as he was the highest representative of the Church of the East. The exchange of letters was a preparation for the official conversion. The content of this letter exchange is unknown. Most probably it was not only on catechetical and doctrinal matters, but also on political and ecclesiastical issues. The request for a metropolitan of their own indicates the politico-ecclesiastical dimension of the affair. This was a mission 'from above'. It is possible that the mission among the Turks under Elias of Merv some 150 years earlier prepared the ground for the official state conversion.<sup>58</sup>

### **Timothy's Rule over External Dioceses**

As for distant countries such as China and India, before the time of Timothy the bishops used to gather together and ordain a metropolitan for them (the countries concerned) because of the difficulty on the roads. Due to certain riots that broke out and some rebels against these chairs since the days of Mār Timothy, this regulation applied only before Timothy's time. That is, Timothy prohibited the bishops from ordaining a metropolitan and even forbade the letters which, according to custom, were sent to the bishops by *Catholicoi* so that they could ordain a metropolitan. The bishops used to place the handwritten letter, which contained the letter and the order for ordination, on the back of the ordinand, as if it replaced the hand of the Catholicos. Timothy prohibited this and as well as the ordination by means of the letters. The Catholicos used to discard his staff, calotte and pallium and send them to some bishops or the metropolitan; the bishops of that hyparchy came together and ordained the metropolitan, while the Gospel lay on his back with the letter of the Catholicos.<sup>59</sup>

This was the regulation for metropolitans to be ordained in external dioceses. In a letter to Mār Yāhballāhā, Timothy regulated the way how to choose and ordain bishops, who were not metropolitans. He wrote that the presence of three persons is not necessarily required for ordination because Mār Yāhballāhā and Qardāg are exempt from the regulation in distant countries.<sup>60</sup> They, the two metropolitans, should choose the candidates. Instead of a third person, they should place the book of the gospel on the episcopal throne on the right side. This was a case of decentralization.

Thus, Timothy facilitated the ordination of bishops in distant regions. From the Synodal Canon of 'Abdīšō', we learn that the Metropolitans of Samarkand, India and China were released from the duty to participate in the General Synod of the Church. However, every six years they had to write a letter to the Patriarch in which they should affirm their submission and report on the

<sup>58</sup> GUIDI 1903, 34-35 (Syr.); 28-29 (Lat.).

<sup>59</sup> IBN AT-ṬAIYIB in HOENERBACH AND SPIES, transl. 1957, vol. 2, 120; 118.

<sup>60</sup> BUDGE 1893, 2:490-91; 1:267; PLATT 2017, 117,

situation in their dioceses. This kind of correspondence was a means of unity and the only way for those metropolitans far away from Baghdad. Whether this regulation was already in force at the time of patriarch Timothy I, is not clear. But it seems that informing the patriarch by letters was already in practice for the metropolitan dioceses of Dailom and Gilan.

## Summary

So far, the discussion of this paper has dealt with the mission of the Church of the East in the western part of Central Asia at the time of Catholicos-Patriarch Timothy I (\*727/8; reign 780-823 AD). The mission area concerned is the southwestern coastal region of the Caspian Sea and the region east of it. These regions did not belong to the Abbasid state, but were independent. That was one of the reasons for the choice of this area. The Islamic state forbade missionary activities among Muslims.

The religion in the area was characterized as 'pagan'. Several religions and cults were obviously subsumed under this term. They were demarcated from Judaism and though not explicitly from Manichaeism. Manichaeism was a strong religion in Central Asia at that time. In one of the descriptions of the barbarian religion it is said that they did not even know "God and the Governor of all". The underlying concept was a hierarchy of religions and cults. The 'pagan' religion was a religion of a lower level and the monotheistic religion was on the top of the hierarchy. The mission aimed first at the low level, the 'pagan' religion. The development of religions had to go from the 'pagan' religion to monotheistic religions.

The 'pagan' religion was also regarded as being associated with a lower level of civilization. It was considered a barbarian civilization. Converting to Christianity did not only mean converting to a 'higher' religion but joining a 'higher' civilization as well. The missionaries had not only to proclaim Christianity but also to spread a Christian civilization with all its elements like fasting and feast. To join Christianity could enhance the social capital for the individual person and the whole community alike.

Religion had also a political dimension as it is shown by the conversion of the Turkic king with his tribe. If the state had a highly respected religion like Islam, Manichaeism, Judaism or Christianity, it could have its respect raised and the political capital enhanced as well. This was obviously the motive behind the conversion. Religion also symbolized and realized a dependency on other communities and states of the same religion. Thus, for the king of the Turks, it was important to show his independence from the Islamic neighbor state as well as from other Turkic tribes who followed other religions. None of the neighboring state had Christianity as their state religion. The conversion of a

whole state or tribe had to take into consideration the social and especially the political capital that could be enhanced by it.

Monks who were selected for missionary works became metropolitans in the missionary areas. The patriarch had chosen a particular monk, ordered his ordination and confirmed him. Then he was sent to the city for his mission. He took with him a number of monks from the same monastery, who aided him in the missionary work and possibly became suffragan bishops in the missionary area. In that way, a missionary area was assigned to a specific monastery. In the reported case Mār *Šūbhālīšō* 'originating from the monastery of Beth 'Abe got two successors from the same monastery accompanied by a group of monks from it.<sup>61</sup> The missionary bishops normally kept the contact with the monastery where they came from. They may have returned to it during their term of office, but it was foreseen that they would come back at the end of their service. When their mission area was too far away, they would not return like in the case of Qardāg. If they would pay a visit or come back, then they would be a source of information about the mission.

The conversion of a whole tribe was a political affair that was not assigned to missionary monks. This kind of mission was reserved for the patriarch. It was highly political and demanded the highest dignitary of the Church. It was the patriarch who at the same time carried political weight in the Abbasid state. This missionary work also had to take into consideration the ecclesiastical-political aspects of the metropolitan who held a politically relevant position in the state with the new state religion and other structures of the church.

The 'normal' missionary work had the following procedure: word proclamation, evangelical social change, church planting and church formation. The proclamation of the Gospel was accompanied by miracles and great deeds. The social change according to the Gospel values included eradication of rites and places of the old religion and purification for the introduction of Christian values. After catechism and baptism of the neophytes, they would construct a church. The next step was to ordain deacons and priests for the church. Supposedly they were chosen for the local people, thus the church was localized and the 'missionary team' could go further. There was no report that the formation of a local clergy meant also a certain inculturation. However, the common liturgy was a sign of coherence and unity of the church. It seems that the local clergy did not become bishops as it was only reported that the monks of the group who accompanied the metropolitan to his mission area became bishops.

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<sup>61</sup> An overview of the importance of the monasteries for the mission of the Church of the East in the 4th-5th centuries and their missionary activities is given by Christelle Jullien, "Stratégies du monachisme missionnaire chrétien en Iran". See JULLIEN in JULLIEN 2011.



The bishop and the monks needed a caravan in order to go to the place intended for them. Missionaries depended on trade routes. And the mission was carried out along the trade routes. The caravans gave the needed security during the travel. This service however did not seem to be without consideration. The monks had probably to assure supranational assurance and spiritual accompaniment. The reported healing service is an indication for this counterpart.

The trade routes were not only necessary for the traveling of the clergy but also for the merchants to function as post office, carriers from one place to the other. The patriarch required information about the situation in the external dioceses and the renewal of the submission to the patriarchate at regular intervals. The postal system based on the trade activities was also an important means of information for the monasteries.

The cohesion of the Church of the East and the unity of the missionaries as well as external metropolitans with the patriarchate had to be assured. The problem for the patriarchate was that of the distant rule. Various measures were adopted for this. Because of the long distance, the metropolitans had to report about the situation in their metropolitanates and to renew their submission to the patriarch, as already mentioned. The suffragan bishops were exempt from this procedure. The Patriarch had to choose, ordain or confirm the metropolitan, whereas the suffragan bishops were chosen and ordained by the metropolitan together with a second and a third bishop, in special cases replaced by the Evangeliary. The network of the metropolitans was the basis of the ecclesiological coherence of the Church of the East. The same liturgy was the symbol of the Eucharistic unity. This was mentioned in the letter to Mār Māron. But the Church of the East also included many different cultures and not all regulations satisfied each individual situation. The metropolitans in different cultures had to have a certain liberty. Nothing was reported about enculturation, but that a local clergy was ordained may indicate that efforts for enculturation were made.

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THE FRIEND OF MY ENEMY:  
THE CHURCH OF THE EAST AND SINO-CENTRAL ASIAN RELATIONS  
IN THE MID-9<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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In 840, in a surprise attack after considerable internal dissension, the Uighur Khanate was crushed by a coalition led by its Khirgiz archenemies, and Uighur survivors scattered to the winds.<sup>1</sup> Several groups of those survivors fled east, arriving in Tang China, in the Ordos (Tiande) area far north of Chang'an, as refugees. At this point the Uighur and Tang had a fairly well-established relationship built on mutual distrust. The Uighurs had "helped" the Tang out of the embarrassing An Lushan rebellion by providing crucial support in conquering back both of their capitals several times, but had also helped themselves to the material goods of those capitals in a way that appalled the cultured Tang-China. Nevertheless, the Tang kept sending princesses to marry Uighur Khans.

In any case, being supplicant was not customary to these particular refugees, so it should be said that they did not always behave in appropriately humble fashion, but the sources seem to indicate that they did indeed take steps to appear less threatening, and eventually even submitted to the Tang, their leader accepting Tang suzerainty. It should further be noted that the Tang, while unclear about how they would deal with this encroachment on their territory from such refugees, did supply them with food and supplies for a number of years.

But the threat won out, and in the early part of 843, the Tang attacked, massacring everyone. They memorialized this attack by granting a mountain nearby the name of *Shahu Shan*,<sup>2</sup> meaning, "kill the barbarians' mountain". Shortly thereafter they severely censured the Uighur religion, Manichaeism, throughout the empire, and seeing how well that worked followed up with an attempt to suppress Buddhism in what has come to be called the Hui-Chang Suppression.

This is not new or groundbreaking history for most of this audience, and other than the mention in the Tang records that during the above-named suppression the *Daqin* and *Muhufu* practitioners should also be cast out,<sup>3</sup> this does not directly

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<sup>1</sup> For details of this episode see DROMPP 2005, 39ff.

<sup>2</sup> "Shahu Shan 殺胡山" also called "Hei Shan 黑山" in today's Henan Province

<sup>3</sup> See PHILIP 1998, 125.

relate to Christianity. But it is nevertheless a connection. The censuring of Christians and Zoroastrians in this period, and the casual way it is addressed in the Tang records seems casual, almost indifferent, yet in reading about this suppression in other sources, one gets the sense that to the Buddhists at least, it was fairly severe, and to the Manicheans, particularly in light of their affiliation with the Uighurs, it was devastating.

On that devastation, Beckwith writes:

With the full realization that the power of the Uighurs, their allies and rivals had been destroyed, the Chinese became consumed with xenophobia. A month after the massacre of the Uighur refugees, the Tang ruler suppressed Manichaeism in China. This entailed closing all Manichaean temples (which had been built at the behest of the Uighurs), confiscating their wealth, and executing Manichaean priests.<sup>4</sup>

His words, “the Chinese became consumed with xenophobia” are significant and worth really diving into here. While there are those who would cry that the term *xenophobia* is anachronistic, a fear of those who are different leading to policy changes at a macro level is well attested throughout history. After all, it was not modern society that gave us the term.<sup>5</sup> More to point, however, is Beckwith’s statement that Tang-China *became* xenophobic. This is to say that there was a time when they were not.

Which means that, where the Church of the East is concerned, their entry into China fell solidly in a *non-xenophobic* period, a time when outsiders were welcomed into China and indeed encouraged to contribute to Chinese society, even becoming sinicised, but nevertheless retaining vestiges of their own cultural background, including their faith. Subsequently, their forced removal fell into a *xenophobic* period when outsiders were no longer welcome. Thus, in order to understand why the Church of the East, among other religious groups, was banned from China, we need to understand why they were welcomed in the first place, and to do that it is important to examine a briefly the movement of people, a concept we often today call immigration.

Immigration is a political firebomb these days in the global West.<sup>6</sup> It is an issue that currently greatly informs political debate, and one cannot write on the subject in any contemporary fashion without inadvertently entering those debates. But contemporary Western society is not the only point in human history that has had

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<sup>4</sup> BECKWITH, 189.

<sup>5</sup> For a look at the ideas behind the term, see the intro and the essays in part IV in HARRISON 2002, ed., 1ff. cf. ISAAC 2004, especially chapter 1.

<sup>6</sup> See for instance HERO & PREUHS 2007 in *American Journal of Political Science* 51 (July, 2007): 498-517.

to work through the political implications of immigration policies. Many cultures at many different points of time have wrestled with these very questions. There are myriad reasons, so-called the push/pull factors that drive an individual or a group to immigrate not least of which is the opportunity cost of embarkation.<sup>7</sup> The state of the world today has lowered the opportunity cost for immigration to a place far below where it would generally have been in the medieval or ancient worlds such that more distant peoples are willing to set forth on more grand quests to reach their desired destination. Nevertheless, the same factors that drive immigration today have always driven immigration. There have always been tyrants, poverty, or instability moving people to find a new place to call home. Central Asia in late antiquity was one such place.

And there have always been places on the other side of that spectrum, where opportunity, order, or simply the possibility of sustenance invited. One of the deep-seated fears in Chinese culture is chaos,<sup>8</sup> which informed both their opening up and closing. At its outset, the Tang Empire was being constructed on relatively open if not expansionist grounds, and welcoming immigrants was an encouraged norm, though in a far different way than might fit our current sensibilities. This was largely grounded in the Tang perception of its cultural, political, and economic role in the world. That perception drove the Tang to expand, and those at its periphery either reacted with hostility, seeing themselves as occupying the same cultural space that Tang was laying a claim to, or surprisingly enough often in supplication or even assimilation. But as this process was driven by Tang self-perception, when that perception was shaken, the status of those who had been clients, so to speak, shifted as well.

How did Tang-China perceive itself? There are a plethora of studies that have examined the Tang as both heirs of their Confucian heritage as well as of the more martial spirit of the steppes,<sup>9</sup> which will not be repeated here. We often perceive China as being anti-expansion, because that point of view is filtered through documentation written by the Confucian elite who administered the country, but there was often an expansive quality to Chinese dynastic progression especially at the beginning of a dynasty.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For a fuller definition of these terms, see the explanation in ARTHUR 2018 at <https://cis.org/Arthur/Looking-Push-Factors-Central-America>. Accessed May 17, 2019.

<sup>8</sup> This is certainly true in modern China; see YUEN 2019 at <https://www.ecpr.eu>, <https://ecpr.eu/filestore/paperproposal/94e6e2c5-c31a-4cd8-8759-266d21ccb81d.pdf>, accessed May 10, 2019; cf. KHAN 2018, especially the first chapter, and BIDDULPH 2015. But the notion is well established in ancient China as well. See the discussion in SCHWARTS 1985, both the intro chapter and chapter 4.

<sup>9</sup> For a couple strong examples see BECKWITH 2009, 169ff. See also SKAFF 2012, 32ff, 108ff.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. ROTHSCHILD 2006 in *Early Medieval China* 12:123-150.



For instance, the Han who at the outset of the Tang were seen as the pinnacle of Chinese greatness had been relatively expansionist, helping solidify Guangzhou as a Chinese city and extending control over places such as Korea, the Tarim Basin, and attempting to do so in Vietnam. The Han pursuit of order and *Li* lent itself well to military expansion. China was *Zhongguo*, the Center of the World, or *Tianxia*, All-under-heaven. To the Han this meant to “Divide, Dominate, and Destroy,<sup>11</sup>” to preserve the order of Chinese society. While expansionism did not fit into the Confucian Ideal, order and the pursuit of proper rites fit well.<sup>12</sup>

But to the Tang, the enlightened society they had attained should be shared with those less able to attain it themselves. Some might willingly submit to Chinese order, but some would not, and those would need further persuasion.<sup>13</sup> The Tang house of Li, like their Sui predecessors, came from semi-Han/semi-Central Asian heritage,<sup>14</sup> and in their opening years, expansion almost for the sake of expansion was the norm. Beckwith among others would say that their motivation was primarily economic, an attempt to dominate the Silk Road and its wealth, eliminating the middlemen.<sup>15</sup> But drawing in allies and clients was also practical and contributed to the ethos of China. If the order inherent to Chinese society was so great, then it should be shared, by force if necessary. Sunzi was likewise of Chinese heritage in the Tang, and he had exhorted leaders to conquer their enemies without conquest.<sup>16</sup> How better to do this than to absorb these outsiders, letting them contribute to Chinese society in a variety of ways?

And so the Tang, in their outset, expanded, but did so magnanimously. And the result was immigration. Looking at the Chinese nation today, we might be prejudiced into seeing China as anything but an immigrant nation. For much of the last few centuries, China has been an emigrant nation, with clear waves of Chinese diaspora taking place periodically over much of that span on up to the present.<sup>17</sup> But even in the present, immigration is picking up in Mainland China.<sup>18</sup> China is an increasingly stable country, and that stability draws people.

So it was in the Tang, and Tang Chinese were aware of this.<sup>19</sup> They often found precedence in the most unlikely places, such as Cao Cao, a three kingdoms figure known for his arrogance. He made this statement after accepting the movement

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<sup>11</sup> BECKWITH 2009, 126

<sup>12</sup> An interesting look at this idea is WANG 2011, 3ff.

<sup>13</sup> SKAFF 2012, 191ff

<sup>14</sup> LEWIS 2009, 31. cf. BINGHAM 1941, ch. 8.

<sup>15</sup> BECKWITH 2009, 50ff

<sup>16</sup> For an interesting take, see YUEN 2014b, particularly the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter.

<sup>17</sup> A number of studies have been conducted on this topic over the years. For a collection of strong articles see TAN 2013, ed.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance, RICHBURG 2018.

<sup>19</sup> WANG 1995 in *Chinese Journal of Population Science* Vol. 7, No. 1. (1995), 27-38.

of 100,000 households of the Xianbei people in 263. “The barbarians from the east, west, south, and north, widely hated for their arrogance, slyness, greed, and ferocity, are all grateful for our magnanimity and have pledged allegiance.”<sup>20</sup>

During the Tang period, the number of supplicants seeking a better existence poured in. It is impossible to say exactly how many came, but come they did in vast numbers, with various accounts listing whole tribes moving into China and being willingly relocated into less populated areas.<sup>21</sup> Recent estimates argue that at its outset, Tang China was 7% immigrant. At its close, between 12% and 19%.<sup>22</sup>

How did they achieve these numbers? Partly through a ministerial class that was willing to seek precedence. An example is Wen Yanbo, a senior advisor for Tang Taizong. When pressed on whether immigrants were desirable he responded by citing an earlier story demonstrating the practicality of outsiders working in China: “During the reign of Emperor Kuang Wu Di, the Han government exhibited an absence of suspicions by allowing the Huns to settle down in Wuyuan, so that their tribe and customs were kept intact. As a result, the Huns were pacified and a sparsely populated area inhabited.”<sup>23</sup>

As immigrants moved into China, some enclaved and sought to maintain their cultural identity as seen above, but many sought to enter fully into Chinese life, and the clearest means to do this was through education. Marc Abramson writes: The Tang state’s best known Sinicizing and civilizing institutions were academies established in the capitals and major cities to educate the children of Tang and foreign elites. Many of the former were students of non-Han ancestry who, with the authorities’ assent, aimed to assimilate further and climb socially by acquiring prestigious Confucian learning and thence gaining office... A number reached important positions in Tang society and officialdom, some even achieving the Tang equivalent of citizenship and almost completely assimilating to Tang society.<sup>24</sup>

Likewise, the majority Han people accepted and even promoted this. One Li Yansheng, of Central Asian ancestry was valiantly defended by Tang literati who argued that outsiders could be Chinese at heart though different in appearance, just as many Chinese look right but are barbarians inside,<sup>25</sup> a notion with interesting parallels in the present. The Tang even went so far as to incentivize

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<sup>20</sup> *History of the Jin Dynasty (Jin Shu)* 2. Quoted in WANG 1995, 30.

<sup>21</sup> WANG 1995, 30.

<sup>22</sup> ABRAMSON 2008, 220

<sup>23</sup> From *History of the Tang Dynasty (Jiu Tang Shu)* 194. Cited in WANG 1995, 31

<sup>24</sup> ABRAMSON 2008, 176

<sup>25</sup> CHEN - CH' IEN - GOODRICH 1966, vol. xv. 8-10. For analysis of this see ABRAMSON 2008, 186.

immigration, forbidding minority peoples to be pressed into labor gangs or military service.<sup>26</sup>

So where did faith come into all this. For one, the recognition of foreign faiths stood as an additional incentive to bring in outsiders. While religion can and generally does transcend ethnic boundaries, it is generally a component of cultural identity. It has been argued that the “marketplace” of religion that we live in today in the Global West is a historical anomaly,<sup>27</sup> that the major faiths of the world today have all at some point been the social framework of a people or peoples. It has also been argued that religion was often used by various peoples in Medieval Asia as a tool to distinguish themselves from others.<sup>28</sup> A notable example is the Khazars who elected Judaism in part at least to be beholden neither to Baghdad nor Constantinople.<sup>29</sup> There are many peoples, such as the Jewish people themselves, or the Arabs, for whom such an allegation would be untenable, but it becomes very plausible with peoples such as the Uighurs, Tibetans, or even the Tang themselves.

Taking the Tang, consider that in the Sui period Buddhism was officially endorsed, but when the Tang rose to power, they were so staunchly supporting Daoism. They connected the Li family that headed the dynasty to Laozi, alleging that he shared the same surname, and was thus a progenitor of the new dynasty.<sup>30</sup> But early Tang was characterized by a degree of magnanimity that is unusual throughout history and almost unheard of in the medieval period. Even as they were distinguishing themselves from their neighbors by accepting an official faith that was distinctly Chinese, they openly accepted and even promoted minority faiths. One might argue that this was politically expedient, as the Buddhists in particular comprised a significant portion of their population,<sup>31</sup> but it had the added benefit of contributing to their immigration policies.

This was the milieu in which the Church of the East entered China, at least officially. During the 7th century Mesopotamia and Persia were anything but stable, and while we know now that Islam and Arab culture were to have a long-term impact on a far greater region than simply that which had once been the Sassanid empire, people of that time did not know that. What they did know was that China was stable, and at least not an enemy. It was in this context that many Persians, including those in the royal family, fled towards the East, taking advantage of Tang magnanimity but hoping that they might one day regain their

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<sup>26</sup> WANG 1995, 31.

<sup>27</sup> JONES 2005, 9ff

<sup>28</sup> See: BECKWITH 2009, 174ff.

<sup>29</sup> GOLDEN 2005, 123-162.

<sup>30</sup> LEWIS 2009, 92ff.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

throne.<sup>32</sup> Some of these were undoubtedly Christians, hence Christianity at that point being given the name, *Bosi Jingjiao*, the Persian Religion.

And these Christians, alongside probably a number of Zoroastrians as well as Manichaeans and even Muslims, began to integrate themselves into the Tang political machine.

But things change. Imperial magnanimity is not always reflected at the base levels of society. There were a number of conflagrations that preceded the Shahu Shan massacre mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The Yangzhou massacre<sup>33</sup> and several Guangzhou<sup>34</sup> uprisings in which Arabs and other central Asian merchants were killed are a few examples. Undoubtedly there were others that never made the records. People coming in from outside, bringing their faith and way of life, are “others.” Some people respond to the other with openness, some with fear and dread.

Through the highpoints of the Tang, the polity would stand by its policies and the outsiders would flow in. But the An-Shi rebellion initiated by a trusted outsider and devastating to China, rocked those policies. They did not change overnight, after all, outsiders such as the Uighurs had ultimately helped the Tang regain their country, but increasingly the polity itself began to see these immigrants as “others” and eventually found pretext to act on that point of view.

It is telling that in the one document we have that gives some insight into the demise of the Church of the East in China, that “other, us” dichotomy is present.

[A]s for the Ta Ch'in (Syrian) and Muh-hu-fu (Zoroastrian) forms of worship, since Buddhism has already been cast out, these heresies must not be allowed to survive. People belonging to these also are to be compelled to return to the world... and become taxpayers. As for foreigners, let them be returned to their own countries, there to suffer restraint...<sup>35</sup>

In conclusion, the Church of the East, although other from China, seized the opportunity of Tang magnanimity towards the other to come into China and integrate into Chinese society, but when other became undesirable, were subjected to dismissal.

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<sup>32</sup> See BONNER 2020, 338-339. Cf. PASHAZANOUS & AFKANDE 2014, 139-155.

<sup>33</sup> This is well attested in Chinese and western sources. Jacques Gernet argues that it was the wealth of the Persian and Arab merchants that triggered Tang xenophobia, although that seems simplistic. See GERNET 1996, 292.

<sup>34</sup> Unlike the Yangzhou massacre, this one is not mentioned in Chinese sources. These mention the conquest of the city by rebel forces, but ascribe those forces' departure as due to a plague. See SHAPIRO 2001, 60.

<sup>35</sup> PHILIP 1998, 126.

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# HOW EXACTLY DID MARY CONCEIVE JESUS BY THE HOLY SPIRIT? A PHILOLOGICAL APPROACH TO THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE PNEUMATOLOGY OF THE SOGDIAN CHRISTIANS

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## Introduction to the Question of the Identification of the Holy Spirit

Theology as the study of the divine, and Christology as the study of Christ Jesus are the familiar fields of the study of the Christian faith. A less familiar field or, better to say, a less frequent term, is Pneumatology, which refers to the study of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. “Pneumatology” is a technical and rather challenging term that one would hear in seminaries of theology, but likely not during Sunday services.

In its religious sense, the term “Pneumatology” was introduced after the early Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the Septuagint, produced between the third and second centuries BCE. In this translation, the Hebrew term *ruah*, from proto-Semitic *rūh* “blow,” “breath” and “wind,” was translated *pneuma* in Greek.<sup>2</sup> And in this text, *pneuma hagion* was the Greek translation of the Hebrew *ruah qodšo*, which literally means “the Holy Wind” or “the Holy Breath.” On the other side, the Greek *pneuma* is etymologically related to “breath” or “blow,” and has the basic meaning of “air in motion” as something necessary to life.<sup>3</sup>

In some verses of the Septuagint, however, the Hebrew *ruah* was translated *anemos*, which means “wind.” Contextually, while *pneuma* seems to be a vivid,

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<sup>2</sup> TIBBS, 58-60; HILDEBRANDT 1993, 7. For the translation of the Hebrew *ruah* as “spirit” in English see: EDWARDS 2009, 57. Similar translations can be found in Syriac-English and Arabic-English dictionaries and philological works on these Semitic languages. The English translations for the word, which do not convey the meaning of “wind” or “breath” are debatable. The term “spirit” entered into English as a loanword from Latin. The Latin *spiritus* meant “breath.” For more reflections on the complexity of the translation of “spirit” in Judeo-Christian contexts see also: THISELTON 2013, 25.

<sup>3</sup> For two very recent and related studies on the matter see: MARTIN 2020, 277-303; VETÖ 2019, 29-73.



intelligent, and supernatural entity, *anemos* appears as a merely natural phenomenon with physical characteristics, deprived of any spiritual dimension. In contemporary English translations of the Bible, *pneuma* has generally been translated “spirit” and *anemos* “wind.”<sup>4</sup> Concretely, it is not that clear how the translators of the Septuagint decided to translate some occurrences of *ruah* as *pneuma* and some others as *anemos*. Still, another Hebrew term carries a close meaning. The Hebrew term *nefeš* was translated *psyche* in the Septuagint. This Hebrew term means “breath,” but also is understood to mean “life,” and “soul.”<sup>5</sup> Yet, based on some verses of the gospels and the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, many Christians around the world have visualized the Holy Spirit manifested as a dove or as fire. These manifestations, however, occur in only a few episodes recorded in certain verses of Scripture. In other verses, it does not make sense to apply the same image. One instance is the case of the conception of Jesus by the Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup> This is narrated in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. According to the Gospel of Matthew, chapter 1:18-20, it seems that Mary conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit unexpectedly. Her surprised fiancé, Joseph, was informed about what had happened by an angel of the Lord.

Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit’.

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<sup>4</sup> Likely, it begins with Latin translations in which *ruah/pneuma* translated as *spiritus* receive a new dimension. The Latin *spiritus*, originally meaning “breath,” developed to mean also “soul.” See: ANDREWS 1875, 1448. In English dictionaries, the word “soul” itself has several meanings. It means “the spiritual part of a person,” among other meanings. See: *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* 1995, s.v. “soul”. When it comes to “spirit,” the same dictionaries explain it as “a person’s soul.” Ibidem, s.v. “spirit”. As a loanword from Latin *spiritus*, written “spirit” in English, the term even developed further, far from having to do with “breath” or “wind.” It means: the nonvisible part of human being; the character or the characteristic of someone or something; and recently, distilled alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. In Old English, *pneuma hagion/spiritus sanctus* were translated *hālig gāst*. In the King James Bible (1611) it was translated “the Holy Ghost.” Gradually, from the twentieth century, the English translators of the Bible preferred to use “the Holy Spirit,” because “ghost” does not denote “breath” or “wind.” See: *The Merriam-Webster New Book of Word Histories* 1991, 197, 223.

<sup>5</sup> The challenging aspect of the Hebrew words associated with “breath” and their translation in the Septuagint has been noticed by scholars. See: NOORT in RUITEN-VAN KOOTEN 2016, 8-9; VAN DER MEER in RUITEN-VAN KOOTEN 2016, 47-50; PLEIJEL 2019, 194-206.

<sup>6</sup> What is meant in this article is Mary’s conception of Jesus. It should not be confused with the conception of Mary, also called the Immaculate Conception by Catholics.

In the Gospel of Luke, chapter 1:34-35, Mary is depicted as more aware of what is going on. She is informed about the divine plan, since the angel of the Lord announces it to her in advance.

Mary said to the angel, ‘How can this be, since I am a virgin?’ The angel said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.’

A few verses later, in verse 41, Mary’s relative, Elizabeth, also experiences the Holy Spirit:

When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the child leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.’

These passages indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit neither as a dove nor as a flame of fire, which are familiar elements in the iconographies of the Annunciation. If there was no dove and no fire, how did Mary (and Elizabeth) experience the Holy Spirit? Did they experience the Holy Spirit as a ghost, as German or old-fashion English translations for *pneuma hagion* might suggest? Or did they experience the Holy Spirit as a wind as one may deduce from the Hebrew origin of the term *pneuma*?

### The Holy Spirit in the Sogdian Translation of the Gospels

The gospels were originally written in Greek based on Aramaic oral traditions. The Greek gospels were translated into Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic, in the first centuries after Christ. Different Syriac translations of the gospels are extant. When it comes to the words with which we are concerned, the Syriac translations are faithful to the terminology of the Hebrew Bible (or maybe to the Aramaic oral traditions), translating both *pneuma* and *anemos* with one word: *rūḥā*, derived from the same proto-Semitic root as Hebrew *ruah*.<sup>7</sup> For the other mentioned term, *psyche*, the translators of the gospels in Syriac used *nafṣ*, again in correspondence with Hebrew.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Even in the so-called “mirror translations” from Greek into Syriac, both *pneuma* and *anemos* are rendered as *rūḥā*. On these translations see: BROCK in KRAŠOVEC 1998, 384; Marketta LILJESTRÖM in SALVESEN-LAW 2021, 660. For a Syriac “mirror translation” of the gospels, famous as the Harklean version, see: KIRAZ 1996.

<sup>8</sup> This correspondence, however, should not necessarily be based on a probable impact of the Hebrew scripture on Syriac translations. Hebrew and Syriac, being closely related Semitic languages, share commonalities beyond doctrinal bases.

Subsequently, translators of the gospels from Syriac into Sogdian, a Middle Iranian language,<sup>9</sup> used the word *wāt*, meaning “wind,” to translate *rūḥā*, which was used for both *pneuma* and *anemos*. *Rūḥā de-quḏšā*, the Syriac translation of *pneuma hagion*, was translated *zapart wāt* in Sogdian, meaning “the Holy Wind.”<sup>10</sup> Whether via Sogdian or other Iranian languages, “the Holy/Pure Wind” became the translation of *rūḥā de-quḏšā* for Chinese.<sup>11</sup> For the other word, *nafṣ*, Sogdian translators used the term *rawān*, which can be translated “soul” in English.

Remarkably, since neither Syriac nor Sogdian have a definite article, it is not clear if the readers of the Syriac and Sogdian translations would understand the references to *rūḥā* and *wāt* as “the wind” or “a wind.” In the gospels, where the epithet *de-quḏšā* or *zapart* was mentioned, it would be plausible for readers to conclude that it refers to “the holy wind,” and therefore “the Holy Wind.” In other cases, where simply *rūḥā* or *wāt* were mentioned, the intention of the text could remain open and questionable, if demonstratives were not provided to specify the intention of the author (behind the translation).<sup>12</sup>

This bilateralism, one word for two meanings, was not necessarily disturbing. St. Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373), evoking both meanings, depicted the advent of Jesus poetically. According to Ephrem’s *Hymn on the Faith, No. 18*, Mary’s womb as a sail was filled with the spirit as a wind. He composed:

O sail, pure womb, symbol of the body of our Redeemer! although filled with the wind, it by no means confines it; through the “wind” dwelling in the ‘sail’ live the bodies wherein dwells the soul.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, a Sogdian Christian would understand the scripture to be saying that, at the time of the Annunciation, Mary (and Elizabeth) conceived their children from a wind. For those who are acquainted with the historical development of the notion of “Pneumatology,” the Sogdian translation *zapart wāt* “the Holy Wind” may sound appropriate. But for those who are familiar with “the Holy Spirit” as “the Holy Ghost,” this translation will sound odd.<sup>14</sup> How can the Holy Spirit,

<sup>9</sup> Regarding the classification of Sogdian as a Middle Iranian language see: YOSHIDA in WINDFUHR 2009, 279. In the context of the Christian scripture see: BAUM-WINKLER 2000, 166.

<sup>10</sup> SIMS-WILLIAMS 2016, 240; BARBATI 2016, 265. On the verb *zapartwn*, meaning “to make pure,” in a translation from Syriac into Sogdian see: PIRTEA in TOCA-BATOVICI 2020, 99.

<sup>11</sup> TATUM 2009, 233; JACKSON 1924, 152-5; FOLEY 2009, 370.

<sup>12</sup> In Mt 1:18-20 and Lk 1:34-42, the Greek term(s), which have been translated as “the Holy Spirit” in the English translations, have no definite article.

<sup>13</sup> BEGGIANI 2014, 78; WICHES 2015, 149. See also: MURRAY 2006, 252.

<sup>14</sup> English-speaking theologians and translators of the Bible have not come to the conclusion that they should translate *pneuma hagion* as “the Holy Wind.” Contemporary theological trends propose even more abstract definitions for the identity of *pneuma hagion*. According to a recent handbook of Christianity, “New Testament scholar Gordon Fee has suggested a most concise

sometimes identified as *sophia*, the source of wisdom, be comprehended as an unconscious wind? Is this *wāt* also a kind of ghost or “spirit,” a living and intelligent entity, or it is a natural and worldly material? Is it an imperceptible being or is it indeed a wind whose movement one can feel on her/his skin or among her/his hair? Unfortunately, little is known about Sogdian terms in their Christian context. The reason behind this shortage is the scarcity of extant Sogdian Christian texts. From this literature, what has survived are only fragmentary liturgical materials from a handful of lectionaries and psalters. Our knowledge of Sogdian Christian literature has been shaped upon scanty fragments written in these two genres.<sup>15</sup>

### Brief Survey on the Idea of “the Holy Wind” in the Iranian Languages

In different ancient and new Iranian languages, there is a term for “wind” pronounced differently. *Vayu*, *vā*, *vāta*, *vāt*, *wāt*, and *bād* are derived from a common root.<sup>16</sup> According to a Persian lexicon, the original form of the term was *vā*, taken from the infinitive *vazīdan*.<sup>17</sup> In English, this infinitive can mean “to blow.” It has been used, however, to describe the movement of a wind that creates an air current and not for that expelled air that moves through pursed lips. In other words, it represents a natural phenomenon and not a human action.

It is evident from Middle-Persian sources that “wind” had a divine character. This evidence, however, has its own complexity. Different sources written in Middle Persian were composed based on the doctrines of their own communities. For instance, in its Zoroastrian context the term for “wind” was associated with deities.<sup>18</sup> While there are linguistic commonalities between Sogdian and Middle Persian,<sup>19</sup> it cannot be accurate to assume that what Zoroastrian Middle-Persian sources state about wind is applicable for the analysis of this term in a Sogdian Christian text. What a Zoroastrian or Manichean text represented as “wind” might not necessarily be the same as what a Christian would expect.

Although nothing is known about the vocabulary of the gospels in the Middle-Persian languages, a Zoroastrian text includes some valuable data profitable in

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characterization of the Holy Spirit with the title of his book, *God’s Empowering Presence*. The Spirit is the presence of God [...].” See: LOPEZ ET AL 2010, 266-7.

<sup>15</sup> For the short list of extant Sogdian fragments of the Bible see: SIMS-WILLIAMS 1989, 207. Furthermore: SIMS-WILLIAMS ET AL 2014. For Syriac-Sogdian New Testament fragments see: DICKENS 2020, 237. The Present research is mainly based on the edition of the fragmentary manuscript E5, a lectionary written in Sogdian and Syriac, edited and commented by Chiara Barbati. See: BARBATI 2016.

<sup>16</sup> *Vayu* and *vāta* may were semantically different. See: ROSENFELD 1967, 91.

<sup>17</sup> DEHKHUDA 1998, 3938. This etymology sounds reverse. It deserves to receive new reflections by philologists.

<sup>18</sup> BOYCE 1996, 79-80.

<sup>19</sup> While Sogdian has been classified as an Eastern Middle-Iranian language, Middle Persian belongs to the group of the Western Middle-Iranian languages. See: HAIG 2008, 89.

this research. *Škand Gumānīk Wīčār* is a 9<sup>th</sup>-century Zoroastrian polemical-apologetic treatise. The fifteenth chapter of the book deals with the Christian faith. Some passages of the gospels are paraphrased in this chapter, but, likely, the vocabulary used in these paraphrased passages are taken from a Middle Persian translation of the gospels. According to the author of *Škand Gumānīk Wīčār*:

That in the town of Jerusalem there was a woman of the same Jews who was known for misconduct, and pregnancy became manifest in her. When asked by them thus: “Whence is this pregnancy of thine?” she said in reply thus: “The angel Gabriel came unto me, and he spoke thus: ‘Thou art pregnant by the pure wind’”.

As to that, you should observe thus: “Who apart from that woman, saw the angel Gabriel? And on what account is it expedient to consider that woman truthful?”

Observe, again, that if they say the Messiah arose from the pure wind of the sacred being, that implies ... that the other wind, which is distinct from that, is not from the sacred being and not pure, and another producer is manifested inevitably.<sup>20</sup>

Apart from the polemical-apologetic nature of the text, it is interesting to see how the Zoroastrian narration of Mary’s pregnancy, which takes its vocabulary from the Middle-Persian translation of the gospels, echoes the language of the Sogdian lectionary. In this translation, *rūhā de-qudšā* is not rendered as “the Holy Spirit” (the Holy Ghost), which potentially could be the case, but *vāt-i pāk* “the Holy/Pure Wind.”<sup>21</sup> Theoretically, there were some Persian terms that could serve for the translation of *rūhā* as something close to “spirit” and not “wind,” but the translators preferred to translate *rūhā de-qudšā* as “the Holy/Pure Wind.”<sup>22</sup>

Still complicated, but worth mentioning, are Manichean texts. The Turfan Pahlavi fragment M. 47 records how the apostle Mani healed the brother of the king Shapur.<sup>23</sup> In particular, in a description of Paradise, there is a reference to the

<sup>20</sup> NIGOSIAN 1993, 67.

<sup>21</sup> In Middle and New Persian, *pāk* means “holy” or “sacred.” It is based on this meaning that the Persian poet, Farīd-ud-Dīn ‘Attār (d. 1221), composed: *āfarīn gān-āfarīn-i pāk rā* “Praise the holy creator of soul.” See: FARĪD-UD-DĪN ‘ATTĀR 1977, 1. In its contemporary application, the term is more used to mean “pure,” “sheer,” and “clean.”

<sup>22</sup> MacKenzie in his Pahlavi Dictionary presented *wād*, meaning “wind,” as an equivalent for “spirit.” He did not mention any context in this regard, but likely he took this equivalence from *Škand Gumānīk Wīčār* and nowhere else. See: MACKENZIE 1986, 134.

<sup>23</sup> On this fragment see: COYLE 2009, 94, 120; ORT 1967, 99.

Immortal Wind of Life. This record demonstrates how vivid an even eternal a wind in Manichean beliefs could be.<sup>24</sup> Old Turkic Manichean texts translated from Iranian languages render an elaborated version of a Christian story narrating that “the God Wādzhīwantag [*Vād-žīvandag* “the Living Wind”] unites with the Mother of Life.”<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, a Chinese Manichean source on “the Pure, Marvelous Wind which is a white dove” depicts how Mani and his followers understood and elaborated the Christian image of the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup>

Apart from these post-Christian pieces of literature, one interesting function of wind among Persian-speaking people that might date back to a pre-Christian era was its role in fertilization. Some Persian lexicons state that “wind” was the name of the angel of marriage and betrothal.<sup>27</sup> According to some folkloric traditions prevalent in the northern regions of today’s Iran, it was wind’s function to make young women fertile. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of Nowruz (corresponding with the first days of April), marriageable girls were encouraged to swing in a way that they would receive the vernal wind.

It is not clear if the Sogdian translators were familiar with such aspects of the term “wind” or not. If so, then it would make more sense for them to translate *rūhā* to *wāt* “wind.” This word choice could convey *anemos* perfectly, but also *pneuma* by some means. For the other already-underlined term, *rawān*, however, it can be stated with certainty that, in the Middle and New Persian languages, this term was not associated with “breath,” as the Syriac *nafš* was. It meant the immaterial, invisible and immortal dimension of an individual, and was understood as the counterpart to body, which stands for the tangible and mortal dimension of a human being.

Based on the Sogdian dictionary provided by B. Gharib, and looking at how *wāt* was used in some compound nouns, it is reasonable to conclude that *wāt* meant not only “wind,” but also “soul” or “spirit.” Although the dictionary does not include examples of the use of terms in context, it marks from which text type each term comes. The text types are labeled with B for Buddhist, M for Manichean, C for Christian, and S for Sogdian. Here below there are some considerable glosses:

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<sup>24</sup> JACKSON, *The Second Evocation*, 152.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>27</sup> TABRIZI 1963, 205.

**Table 1.** Some glosses with translations and remarks from Gharib's Sogdian dictionary

No.	Sogdian	text type	Persian	English	remark
9870	wāt'		باد، روح	wind; spirit	in the majority of texts
9877	w'tō'r	B, M, S	جاندار، ذیروح	living; alive	in the majority of texts
9881	w'tmync	C	روحانی، معنوی	spiritual; ( <i>of the</i> ) spirit	
9882	w'tmyny	C	روحانی، معنوی، مینوی	spiritual	
9891	w'tynyy	M	بادی، اثیری، روحانی	( <i>of</i> ) wind; spiritual	
9896	w'xš	M, C, S	سخن، روح، چیز	word; spirit; thing	in the majority of texts
9897	w'xš'yk'	S, M	روحي، روحانی، مینوی	spiritual	

In glosses No. 9877, 9881, 9882, and 9891, *w't* "wind" is used to convey the meaning of "spirit." The most interesting gloss among them is No. 9877. The compound *w'tō'r* literally means "wind holder," but considering to the Persian equals suggested by Gharib, it means *ġāndār* "animal," in its adjective sense, which means "(someone/something) with spirit" or "(someone/something) who/which possesses *anima*."<sup>28</sup> Since "wind" is not holdable or possessable, *w't* in this compound term should refer to "spirit."

The last two words are also interesting. Although they are not associated with "wind" in Gharib's dictionary, they mean "spirit" and "spiritual," respectively. Gharib, specifies that *w'xš*, meaning "spirit" among other meanings, is a Christian term. The exclusively Christian Sogdian dictionary, composed by Nicholas Sims-Williams, includes the term but does not translate it as "spirit."<sup>29</sup> It is the same in Chiara Barabati's glossary for the lectionary E5.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, less central for the present research is the case of the Persian translations for the observed Sogdian glosses, suggested by Gharib. Apart from the compound translation *ġāndār* for gloss No. 9877 that is also a compound term, Gharib did not use the Persian term *ġān*, meaning "spirit" and "soul," in her Persian translations for the above-mentioned Sogdian words. She preferred to use the

<sup>28</sup> The English translations for this gloss, proposed by Gharib, sound less accurate.

<sup>29</sup> SIMS-WILLIAMS 2016, 201.

<sup>30</sup> BARBATI 2016, 254-5.

Arabic *rūḥ*, which is also widely used in Persian. One may ask: Did Gharib differentiate between *ġān* and *rūḥ*? In her dictionary, the term *ġān* appears in No. 1030, where she translated the Sogdian *ʾnyw* as *zindagī*, *ġān*, and *rūḥ* in Persian, but “life,” “soul” and “conscience” in English. The English translation “conscience,” apparently for *rūḥ*, complicates the figuring out what exactly did Gharib mean with the terms *ġān* and *rūḥ*.

### Implicit Pneumatology vs Explicit Pneumatology

As it was observed, while the Greek translation of the Septuagint differentiated between *anemos* and *pneuma*, the Syriac translations from the Greek brought both terms back under the umbrella of one word, namely *rūḥā*. Later, the Sogdian Christians translated it as *wāt* “wind.” But is this idea to keep one word for a term that in some contexts can be understood to mean “spirit” and in some contexts “wind” self-evident? Comparing the Sogdian translation with some other translations from Syriac shows that this choice was not the only way to translate *rūḥā*.

Arabic and New Persian versions of the gospels translated from Syriac demonstrate that the translators differentiated between *rūḥā* as *anemos* and *rūḥā* as *pneuma*.<sup>31</sup> The Arabic gospels were translated as early as the ninth century. They might be from the same time or even earlier than the Sogdian lectionary. In the Arabic gospels, these words were translated *rīḥ* and *rūḥ*, respectively. The earliest extant New Persian translations are not as early as the Arabic ones. They date back to the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries. Although they were translated from Syriac, the differentiation between these two words might be motivated by the already widespread Arabic Christian literature. Despite that, it is important to observe their case because of the genealogical commonalities between New Persian and Sogdian. The New-Persian gospels translate the two words as *bād* and *ġān*, respectively. While *bād*, in correspondence with the Sogdian *wāt*, was used for “wind,” the New-Persian translators used a term for “spirit” (which could also mean “soul”) that existed in a variety of forms in the Middle-Iranian languages.<sup>32</sup> In this respect, if the Syriac translators of the gospels were terminologically restricted to convert both *anemos* and *pneuma* to *rūḥā*, the Iranian-speaking translators, whether in Sogdia or in Persian-speaking territories, were not in a similar condition.

<sup>31</sup> Syriac-speaking commentators of the gospels themselves were aware of the challenge of the understanding and the interpretation of *rūḥā*, whose meanings were hanging between the two opposite earthly and heavenly realms. On this issue see: MATHEWS 1998, xxxv; Sebastian BROCK in AUWERS-WÉNIN 1999, 327-49.

<sup>32</sup> Regarding synonyms for *bād* and *ġān* in Pahlavi see: FARAHWASHI 2002, 53, 163. For the same words in a Sogdian-Persian-English dictionary see: GHARIB 1995, 40, 399. For the word *rawān* in Sogdian see: *ibidem.*, 344.



In sum, two different approaches toward the question of Pneumatology among the speakers of these discussed languages can be recognized: implicit and explicit Pneumatology. In implicit Pneumatology, both *pneuma* and *anemos* are represented as one entity with one name. The Pneumatology of the Syriac and Sogdian Christians belongs to this group. In explicit Pneumatology, however, *pneuma* and *anemos* belong to two different realms. The Greek, Arabic and New Persian translations of Scripture follow this model of Pneumatology.

Still, it should not be neglected that each of these translations belongs to a language with a rich cultural background. The terms for *pneuma* and *anemos* in these languages cannot semantically coincide with each other in every respect. In particular, if we assume that the Syriac *rūḥā* covers both *pneuma* and *anemos*, equally, it is questionable if the Sogdian word, *wāt*, is also operational in this way. As it was observed in the previous part, *wāt* had a supernatural dimension for Iranian-speaking people. Deduced from Gharib's dictionary, synopsized in table 1, it is possible to assume that *wāt* meant both "wind" and "spirit" at the same time. At least, it was so for the Sogdian Christians. Outside of a confessional context, however, *wāt* could not primarily and essentially be understood as *pneuma*, though the Syriac *rūḥā* could.<sup>33</sup> Likely, supernatural dimensions were attributed to or manifested in *wāt*. Primarily and essentially, *wāt* was "wind" and could remain so even without any supernatural significance.

In this respect, there is a *hapax legomenon* name in the Persian literature that deserves to be underlined. The name appears in a legend called *Abū-Muslim-Nāma* composed in the tenth century.<sup>34</sup> The legend is about the local resistance against the Arab invasion of the city of Marv and the great Khurasan during the Umayyad period. The name of a personage of the legend, a citizen of Samarkand, is *Bād-yaldā-i Samarqandi*. The Perso-Syriac name *Bād-yaldā*, meaning "the wind of Yaldā," is a compound name. The first part of the name, *bād*, means "wind." The second part of the name, *yaldā*, means "birth," which in its Persian context was especially used to address the birth of Jesus, in accordance with the Syriac wording of Mt 1:18. Hence, the compound name means "the wind of the birth of Christ." The name clearly demonstrates which kind of Pneumatology was prevalent among the people of the great Khurasan.

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<sup>33</sup> Having said this, it is considerable that an early 14<sup>th</sup>-century Christian Armenian source considered beliefs of the Sogdian Christians "like those of the Greeks." See: SIMS-WILLIAMS in EMMERICK-MAKUCH 2009, 274.

<sup>34</sup> It was composed by Abū-Ṭāhir bin-Ḥassan Ṭartūssi. A copy of this work is saved in the Majlis Library in Iran (IR10-16717) with the signature 1208337 [?]. An edition of the book was published in Tehran in 2001 by Mu'in publisher.

### Implicit and Explicit Pneumatologies: Textual or Actual?

Based on the proposed definitions, while an explicit reading of the Matthean and Lukan passages on Mary's pregnancy will inform readers that Mary conceived the child by *pneuma*, an implicit reading accommodates the alternative reading that Mary received her child from *anemos*. The absolute silence of the fertilizing actor in the both Matthean and Lukan narrations could reasonably persuade to imagine it as an uncommunicative wind, only known thanks to the statement of the angel of the Lord. In order to imagine how these different Pneumatologies would contrast with each other, one should not only read *pneuma* and *anemos* interchangeably, but also visualize their actions interchangeably. This differentiation between the two models of Pneumatology is not only in the level of text and terminology. It deals with the entire acts and presences of *pneuma* and *anemos*, or, implicitly, *pneuma/anemos* throughout Scripture. Subsequently, each Pneumatology depicts a *pneuma hagion* that appears, behaves, and interacts in a different way.

There is historical evidence for reading of Mary's pregnancy as an event in which Mary received the child from an uncommunicative wind. Although the idea of a breezy Holy Spirit was a primeval belief in the ancient world,<sup>35</sup> let us to focus on the traditions of the territories that were geographically, culturally, and ecclesiastically closer to Sogdia. This land was situated where today's Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan meet each other. Roughly speaking, it was a part of Great Khurasan of the pre-modern time.<sup>36</sup> Before the advent of Islam, the territory was inhabited by Buddhists, Manicheans, and Christians. These people were speaking similar variations of one language, called Sogdian. In contemporary classifications, "Sogdian" is the

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<sup>35</sup> A very early record on Mary's conception, which compares the Holy Spirit with wind, is a discourse by Lucius Lactantius (d. 320). He wrote: "Therefore the Holy Spirit of God, descending from heaven, chose the holy Virgin, that He might enter into her womb. But she, being filled by possession of the Divine Spirit, conceived; and without any intercourse with a man, her virgin womb was suddenly impregnated. But if it is known to all that certain animals are accustomed to conceive by the wind and the breeze, why should anyone think it wonderful when we say that a virgin was impregnated by the Spirit of God, to whom whatever He may wish is easy?" See: FLETCHER 1871, 233. In this context, see also: Martin 2014, 11-24. According to Carl Gustav Young on medieval Christianity in Europe: "Then in medieval representations of the miraculous conception, the spirit descends as wind: the *pneuma* comes down from the Father into the womb of Mary; and the curious fact is that the Greek word *pneuma* has taken on its specific meaning only since Christianity"; See: JUNG in LARRETT 1988, 853. In a further interesting case, "over a portal of the Marienkappelle at Würzburg is a relief-representation of the Annunciation in which Heavenly Father is blowing along a tube that extends from his lips to the Virgin's ears, and down which the infant Jesus is descending." Departing from this image, "all nuns still comply of protecting their chastity against assault by keeping their ears constantly covered." See: RONELL 1994, 347; Cf. WEEDMAN 2014, 54.

<sup>36</sup> DURAND-GUÉDY 2015, 2.

name of a language of the family of Middle Persian spoken in Sogdia.<sup>37</sup> Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444), mentioned Sogdian among the list of Christian liturgical languages.<sup>38</sup> Christian communities of Sogdia in Central Asia translated biblical texts from Syriac into Sogdian. These communities emerged inside the Church of Persia. In this regard, Sogdia was linked to Persia not only culturally, but also ecclesiastically.

The Church of Persia was a very ancient Church. It had its roots back in the time of the evangelization of the apostles. Later, as a distinctive form of Christendom, this Church was expanded from Mesopotamia to Central Asia, India, and China. Syriac was the sacred language of this Church, although many of its presbyters were native Persians. After the advent of Islam, many Christians followed the new faith. In a very short time, if not immediately, Arabic became the language of many Christian communities living inside the provinces formerly ruled by the Persian and Byzantine Empires, namely Mesopotamia, Syria, Palestine and Egypt. They began to translate Syriac literature into Arabic. The Syriac Scripture was also translated into Persian, but likely not as early as Arabic. The earliest extant Christian texts written in New Persian date back to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Apart from Christian literature written in Arabic and Persian, the Islamic literature turned out to be a rich source of information on aboriginal Christian traditions incorporated into the new faith, Islam. Concerning the question of Mary's conception, indeed, there are several significant narratives recorded in the Quran and in interpretations of it as well as in the poetry composed by Muslim Persians.<sup>39</sup>

For the following, it is significant to know about the Quran, its textual background, and its literary impact. Scholars have stated that Qur'anic passages have Christian underlayers. In this respect, it should be kept in mind that an *Islamic* version of a narrative from the Quran or in the texts of Muslim authors might be an originally Christian narrative. Often, of course, it is the case that the Christian origins of such narratives are not recognizable at the first glance. The origins might have been forgotten despite their former prevalence among now-extinct Christian denominations. In the present, they seem *Islamic* to us, because the Christianity behind them has not survived.

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<sup>37</sup> The language was used in liturgy until the fourteenth century. See: DE LA VAISSIÈRE 2005, 257.

<sup>38</sup> DE LA VAISSIÈRE 2005, 257.

<sup>39</sup> Today, we know that references to biblical figures, e.g., Zechariah, Mary, Jesus, etc., in the Islamic literature cannot simply be considered as the view of authors of one religion toward the key figures of another religion. Scholars inform us about how not only canonical, but also apocryphal Christian narratives found their way in the Islamic literature. In other words, Muslim authors elaborated what was already narrated and believed by Christians. For a leading study on this topic see: REYNOLDS 2010.

In this regard, it is beneficial to look at what the Quran says about Mary's conception. The Quran states that Mary conceived Jesus through *al-rūh* "the spirit" of God, which was blown into her:

The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His word which He conveyed unto Mary, and a spirit from Him. (Q 4:171)

And Mary, the daughter of 'Imran, who guarded her chastity, so We blew into her from Our spirit, and she believed in the words of her Lord and His scriptures and was of the devoutly obedient. (Q 66:12)

The Quran also states that the creation of Jesus was like the creation of Adam.<sup>40</sup> Jesus was vivified by the breath of God just as Adam was.<sup>41</sup> The term *rīḥ* "wind" does not appear in the qur'anic version of Mary's pregnancy, although *rūḥ* and *rīḥ* are from the same proto-Semitic root.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the Quran presents wind as the fertilizing factor in the process of divine creation.<sup>43</sup>

From the first Islamic century, also the non-qur'anic narrations about Mary's conception were widely circulated. They were even known among and were transferred by the close relatives of the Prophet. Among the earliest and most well-known ones was Ibn-'Abbas (d. ca. 68/678), the cousin of the Prophet from whom later authors quoted extensively. Another early and oft-quoted author was Wahab ibn-Munabbih (d. 108-120/725-737), a Yemeni of Persian Origin. He was a pupil of Ibn-'Abbas and an expert in pre-Islamic tales as well as *Isra'iliyat*. The exegete Ismā'īl as-Suddī (127/745) was among the authors of popular commentaries on the Quran. Another important narrator, the exegete Ibn-Ġurayġ (d. 150/767), whose grandfather was a Christian, was also quoted by later authors. Ibn-Ġurayġ recorded Muhammad's discussions with the Christians of Naġran about the nature of Jesus.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, he was not only from a Christian background, and therefore likely informed about Christian narratives, but also keenly engaged in doctrinal debates with the Christians around him.<sup>45</sup>

The list of those who commented on the qur'anic version of Mary's pregnancy demonstrates, on the one hand, the early age of the commentaries in the newly established Islamic society; on the other hand, the closeness of some of the

<sup>40</sup> The similitude of Jesus before Allah is as that of Adam; He created him from dust, then said to him: "Be." And he was. (Q 3:59)

<sup>41</sup> [T]hen the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. (Gen 2:7) On Mary's pregnancy in the Quran see: TANNOUS 2019.

<sup>42</sup> On the notion of *rūḥ* in the Quran, see: O'SHAUGHNESSY 1953.

<sup>43</sup> Q 15:22.

<sup>44</sup> On Ibn-Ġurayġ's understanding of "the Spirit" see: 'ABD-UL-ĠANĪ 1992, 71-2, 209-10.

<sup>45</sup> AYOUB 1992, 84.

commentators to the Prophet, whether directly or indirectly. The commentators recorded what was already widespread in the Arabian Peninsula and Mesopotamia at the time of the emergence of Islam or even before this time. Moreover, their point of view should be close to the point of view of the Prophet and of the Quran.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, the commentaries of these exegetes were different from each other in some details. The number of differing details increased when later commentators added quotations from other sources without mentioning their names. It was, however, evident that not all of these accounts could be true. Hence, they decided to include an anthology of the early comments in their works. One of the most comprehensive is that of Rašīd-ud-Dīn Maybudī (d. 6<sup>th</sup>/12<sup>th</sup> cent.). He wrote:

Scholars disagree on the quality of Gabriel's blow. Some of them said that [Mary] had taken off her upper wear. Gabriel took it and blew in its collar and went away. Then Mary wore it and conceived Jesus. Some others told that Mary had worn the upper wear. Gabriel approached her and took her collar by his hand and blew into it; that blow reached her womb and she conceived Jesus. Suddī told that the upper wear, where it covers bosom, was twofold, and Gabriel took her two sleeves and blew in her bosom and the wind of that blow reached her vagina and she conceived. Abī-Ka'b said: 'the spirit entered her and entered into her inner part, then she gave birth to him.' And it was told that Gabriel blew toward her from afar, and a wind delivered that blow to her and she conceived from that.<sup>47</sup>

There are some other accounts that either differ in some details or mention some elements that are not present in these observed versions. According to a 5<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup>-century exegesis of the Quran written by an unknown author: "Gabriel took Mary's sleeve and blew into it. Some said that he blew into her collar; that at the end of blowing Jesus appeared in Mary's abdomen;"<sup>48</sup> and some lines later quoting from another source: "When Gabriel showed himself to Mary and announced to her about a child, he pulled Mary's collar toward himself and blew into her collar. Mary conceived Jesus immediately."<sup>49</sup>

Abī-ʿAlī aṭ-Ṭabṛassī (d. 548/1153), the exegete of the Quran, considering the works of Ibn-Ḡurayḡ but also other sources,<sup>50</sup> wrote that Gabriel opened Mary's

<sup>46</sup> Even Ibn-Taymiyya (d. 1328), one of the most conservative theologians and interpreters of the Quran, collected and quoted former Muslim commentaries on Mary's pregnancy and the role of Gabriel.

<sup>47</sup> A similar explanation was proposed by Abūl-futūḡ Rāzī (d. 1157). See: RĀZĪ 1986, 465.

<sup>48</sup> MATINI 1973, 38.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> One of his sources was the exegesis of his master, Muḡammad Ṭūssī (d. 1067) on the Quran. In Ṭūssī's work on Mary's pregnancy see: ṬŪSSĪ in AMELI 1997, 12, 91.

sleeve *with his finger* and breathed into it.<sup>51</sup> A 9<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup>-century Persian historiography written by Mīrḥānd, adds some remarkable metaphors in his words on Mary's conception of Jesus.<sup>52</sup> Mīrḥānd wrote:

Gabriel, approaching Mary, blew a wind to her, into her sleeve according to some accounts, into her collar according to some others, and into her womb according to some else. And at the same time the tree of Mary's prayers conceived the fruit of grace.<sup>53</sup>

In this passage, Jesus is metaphorically presented as "the fruit of grace." The symbolism used in Mīrḥānd's prose is the same that exists in the Lukan narrative "blessed is the fruit of your womb." According to Mīrḥānd's allegory, the wind transforms into the fruit.<sup>54</sup>

Yet, there are two other rather weird versions of this miraculous conception. Although these versions were less common, they are important because of their early age.<sup>55</sup> In one version, Mary conceived her baby from her mouth.<sup>56</sup> After a while, the child came out of her mouth as well.<sup>57</sup> This extraordinary depiction may help the authors to claim that Mary not only *was* a virgin when she conceived Jesus, but also *remained* a virgin after giving birth to Jesus. Though there is no air in this narrative, a dipper interpretation of it might be that Mary *breathed in* the fertilizing air via her mouth as is normal.

In another version of the story, when the body of Adam received the spirit, which is the breath of God blown to him, he raised, sat, sneezed, and praised God. The archangel Gabriel, who was following the scene closely, was asked by God to keep that sneeze upon his palm until the time of the prophet Zechariah.<sup>58</sup> When

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<sup>51</sup> ABĪ-ʿALĪ AT-ṬABRASSĪ 2006, 319. For a biblical study on the relationship between finger and *pneuma* see: WOODS 2001. The Lukan understanding of "the Spirit of God," portrayed in Woods' investigation, recalls Aṭ-Ṭabrassī's narration of the conception, in which Gabriel touched Mary's garment with his finger and blew into it.

<sup>52</sup> Muḥammad ibn-Ḥāwāndšāh ibn-Maḥmūd, famous as Mīrḥānd, was born in Bukhara, but moved to Balkh in his childhood. Afterward, he left Balkh and moved to Herat, where he composed his historiographical work of *Tārīḫ-i Rawzat uš-Šafā*. It will be interesting to examine if the geographical place of his residences, always in Khurasan, has shaped his knowledge or not.

<sup>53</sup> MĪRḤĀND in SABUHI 1959, 432.

<sup>54</sup> Some decades later, Ḥandmīr, Mīrḥānd's nephew, formulated the same story using another metaphor: "Gabriel approached Mary and blew a wind into her sleeve or collar or womb, and at the same time, the shell of Mary's corporality conceived that pearl of the treasure of prophethood." See: HANDMIR in HUMAYI, 140.

<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, while these versions were present in some Persian sources, they were absent in early Arabic ones. Does it mean that these versions of the narrative were the rest of the Christian apocryphal gospels diffused in Persia and not in Arabia?

<sup>56</sup> DABIR-SIAQI 1959, 9. In this context, see also: WEEDMAN 2014, 143.

<sup>57</sup> SIRĀĠ 1963, 44. Similar narratives are recorded from Byzantium. See: CONSTAS 2003, 278-9.

<sup>58</sup> According to some narratives, Gabriel kept the sneeze in a glass vial.

that time arrived, Gabriel blew that sneeze into Mary's sleeve. Mary became pregnant and gave birth to Jesus.<sup>59</sup>

These narratives depict Mary's conception of Christ from the perspective of Muslims who did not limit themselves to what the Quran says about the topic.<sup>60</sup> They all confirm that Mary conceived Jesus by a movement of air, whether as a wind, or as a breath, or as a blow, or as a sneeze. They also agree that it was Gabriel who blew this portion of air into Mary. A slight disagreement between these narratives and the qur'anic verses is what was blown. According to the Quran, what was blown was a *rūḥ* "spirit." Muslim authors did not describe it so. For them, what was blown was a current of air.<sup>61</sup> The term *rūḥ* in its qur'anic context is rather challenging. While the Quran differentiates between *rūḥ* "spirit" and *rīḥ* "wind," the "spirit" that caused Mary's pregnancy was pneumamorphic and could be blown into her.<sup>62</sup> Presumably, the narratives of the Muslim historians and exegetes date back to some early Christian traditions in which *anemos* and *pneuma* were the same.<sup>63</sup> This perception of a unified *anemos/pneuma* was a Pneumatology that gradually lost its doctrinal credibility. From the works of the same Muslim exegetes, it is evident that they found themselves confronted with the question of the relationship between *rīḥ* and *rūḥ*. Abūl-futūḥ Rāzī, has an interesting comment on this dilemma, writing: "it is called *rīḥ* when it is in air, but it is called *rūḥ* when it associates with animal."<sup>64</sup> In other words, according to Rāzī, *anemos* and *pneuma* both refer to one notion. They receive different labels when they are in different places.

Before concluding our observations, one further remark is worth mentioning. The wind (or breath or sneeze) mentioned in the commentaries of Muslims does not seem to be a spirit or a spiritual being. It is portrayed as very earthy and temporary. It lacks any metaphysical dimension. It is the will of God, performed by the archangel Gabriel and received by Mary that creates Jesus out of the wind. But could also the Sogdian *zapart wāt* be such a non-sentient being? Likely it was not. Considering the present study, however, the word choice of the translation

<sup>59</sup> ZANJANI 2002, 404. Cf. LADERMAN 1993, 309; BARING-GOULD 1871, 3.

<sup>60</sup> For a former study on this topic see: KUENY 2013, 32-3.

<sup>61</sup> While the Muslim authors were familiar with the notion of *rūḥ ul-quḍus* "the Holy Spirit" as a divine entity, which is in correspondence with the Syriac *rūḥā de-quḍsa*, such an entity is rarely mentioned in the aforementioned Muslim narratives on Mary's pregnancy. In few cases, it is mentioned in Abūl-futūḥ Rāzī's narrative: "Mary had a cousin called Joseph. Knowing that Mary was pregnant, Joseph decided to kill her. Gabriel appeared to him saying "Behold! Do not commit any harassment against her, for her conception is from *rūḥ ul-quḍus*."" See: Rāzī 1986, vol. 3, 465. Muḥī-ud-Dīn ibn-ʿArabī (d. 1240) stated that it was the Holy Spirit who blew his breath into Mary. See: IBN-ʿARABĪ 1968, 89.

<sup>62</sup> For another reflection on this topic see: STOWASSER 1994, 74.

<sup>63</sup> The role of Mary's garment in her pregnancy narratives, however, might be developed in Islamic culture.

<sup>64</sup> RĀZĪ 1986, vol. 3, 51.

of *rūhā* as *wāt* and nothing else could be seen as the impact of a lost Pneumatology preserved by Muslims, though in a different or modified rendition.

## Conclusion

In its early Christian context, a challenging aspect of the field of Pneumatology is the philological complication of the key term, *pneuma*. In the Septuagint, *pneuma* is a translation of the Hebrew *ruah*, but it is not the only translation of it. In some verses, the Hebrew term was translated *anemos*. The idea that *pneuma* and *anemos* semantically differ was reflected later in the composition of the gospels in Greek. Those who translated the Greek gospels into Syriac translated both *pneuma* and *anemos* with one word, *rūhā*. Subsequently, those who translated the Syriac gospels into Sogdian translated *rūhā* as *wāt*, which primarily meant “wind,” like *anemos*. As a result, the term for *pneuma hagion* “the Holy Spirit” in Sogdian was *zapart wāt*, which could literally mean “the Holy Wind.” That was also what the Syriac *rūhā de-qūdšā* would sound for the Sogdians.

Based on this terminology, the Sogdians understood the third person of the Trinity being consisting of air. Likely this understanding was not exclusively in the level of terminology, and due to the dependency on the language of the original scripture, in this case: Syriac. The acts of the Holy Spirit could be imagined as the acts of a wind. Although scanty Sogdian Christian materials do not let us attest this statement, some accounts from the Muslim world may fill this gap partially. They are found among commentaries of the exegetes of the Quran, and are about Mary’s pregnancy. Most likely they were taken from Christian apocryphal accounts prevalent in the Middle East. Though there is no literal reference to “the Holy Spirit” in these narratives, it is mentioned in detail how Mary conceived Jesus by Gabriel who blew a portion of air into her.

These narratives seem to be based on a lost Pneumatology once prevalent among the Syriac-speaking communities, and later among the Arabic and Middle-Iranian-speaking communities in Arabia, Persia and Central Asia. This Pneumatology should not be seen as a wide deviation from orthodoxy. It could be based on how Jesus himself and his Aramaic-speaking companions understood the Holy Spirit. As a matter of fact, the earliest gospels written in Greek were based on oral materials. Since Jesus and his companions were Aramaic-speaking people, they would have referred to *rūhā* with one word, and not to *pneuma* and *anemos* with two different words. To some extent, the Sogdian translation reflects how *rūhā* was intended and used by Jesus himself and by his followers before the composition of the gospels around 70 CE.



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## THE CROSS AND *JINGJIAO* THEOLOGY

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In a recent study, Charles Stang has argued that the message of the famous Xi'an stele has borrowed heavily from other religions in its "very concepts and content."<sup>1</sup> He sees one example of this in its use of, or avoidance of, references to the Christian cross. The two passages where the cross is mentioned, he argues, show a distinctive and "explicit theology of the cross" that "removes the cross from the context of the death of the Mishihe."<sup>2</sup> In the conclusion to his study, Stang questions whether the local *Jingjiao* Christians "actually adhered to the theology of the cross voiced in the inscription, which would seem a significant departure from their East Syrian heritage," and whether the text was meant for Christians or "for the non-Christian members of their host culture." If the latter, Stang suggests, then it still may have, over time, ended up changing the *Jingjiao*'s own understanding of the cross.<sup>3</sup>

Stang is just one in a series of scholars who have raised the related questions of how to interpret the strange *Jingjiao* texts which often sound more Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist than Christian, and how to account for the absence of teachings which seem central to the Christian message. Already in 1888 James Legge commented that "we cannot but deplore the absence from the inscription of all mention of some of the most important and even fundamental truths of the Christian system" and in particular "anything specially bearing on His crucifixion, His death, His burial, and His resurrection."<sup>4</sup> In the early twentieth century Lionel Giles of the British Museum commented:

It is curious that the significance of the cross as a Christian symbol should nowhere be explained in this inscription. It would seem that the Nestorians were afraid of exposing themselves to profane derision if they were to lay stress on the Crucifixion as the central fact of Christianity.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> STANG 2017, 109.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>4</sup> LEGGE 1888, 54.

<sup>5</sup> GILES 1917, 95. About the same time William Gascoyne-Cecil, in a foreword to P.Y. Saeki's classic 1916 *The Nestorian Monument in China*, spoke similarly of "the mistake made by the Nestorian preachers" who were "ashamed of their faith" (SAEKI 1916, iii).

A.C. Moule's 1931 article in *T'oung Pao* entitled "the Use of the Cross among the Nestorians in China" came to a somewhat similar conclusion, generalizing it to the entire Tang-era church:

... the Nestorians began in the seventh century with the simple Gospel story making little attempt to adapt it to Chinese language or ideas, and called the Cross "the Tree" (木 *mu*, the word used in modern versions of Galatians iii. 13, etc.), but that by the end of the eighth century the Cross was called by the purely Chinese term "Figure of ten", 十字 *shih tzŭ*, and was closely associated with the cardinal points and used as a seal, while all allusion to the Crucifixion was excluded. In other words, the Cross had come to have a magical significance and was used as a charm.<sup>6</sup>

However, the continuation of Moule's articles shows clearly that the Syriac church in Yuan-era China was exemplified by "the prominence of the Cross"—monasteries called 十字寺 (*shí zì sì*), and an inscription from 1281 (Chinkiang, i.e. Zhènjiāng 镇江) which states:

The figure of ten is an image of the human body. They set it up in their houses, paint it in their Churches, wear it on their heads, hang it on their breasts. They consider it as an indicator of the four quarters, the zenith and nadir.<sup>7</sup>

Moule also catalogs the ubiquity of carved crosses—those on stones at Fangshan, on Mongolian tomb pillars, on Quanzhou funerary inscriptions, as well as the bronze Ordos crosses—all showing the prominence of the symbol, no matter how one interprets its meaning.

In what follows, therefore, I wish to take yet another look at the use and non-use of the cross within the Chinese churches of Syriac origin. I will argue that the *Jingjiao* and *Yelikewenjiao* neither marginalized the use of the cross nor altered its association with the crucifixion of Christ. Although the Chinese church retained the cross-centered theology of its Syriac mother church, it indeed did use it in a culturally appropriate way.

### **The Cross in Early Christianity**

Before we address the meaning of the cross in early *Chinese* Christianity, we need to review the theological and symbolic aspects of the cross in early Christianity in general. Crucifixion was the most painful, humiliating, and shameful form of public execution carried out by the Romans. It was reserved for slaves and for the

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<sup>6</sup> MOULE 1931, 80.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81.

worst malefactors and traitors.<sup>8</sup> Its public nature was meant to discourage observers from breaking the law and sharing the same fate. The suffering it produced is still reflected in our modern English world *excruiciating*. That Jesus of Nazareth, thought by his followers to be the long-awaited Messiah, was executed by this method (as all four canonical Gospels agree), seemed to doom his project, no matter how one interpreted its scope and goal. His opponents saw this as the ultimate sign of his weakness and defeat. His supporters, however, soon claimed to have seen their leader resurrected from death, a death which they proclaimed to be a substitutionary act that simultaneously magnified the Messiah's love for mankind and his obedience to his Father. However, the mere fact of the "death" of God's Son was itself paradoxical in the extreme. When this was coupled with the outwardly humiliating method of his death, the incongruity became even more evident. As a result, St. Paul called the cross a *skandalon*/stumbling block (Galatians 5:11) which prevented a rational acceptance of Jesus as the long-promised Messiah and as the Son of God—and prevented belief in his ultimate resurrection and triumph. In a counter-intuitive twist, the cross soon became and still remains a symbol of triumph in all branches of the Christian church.

How did this happen? The Christian counter-attack was bold. Jesus had "scorned the shame" of the cross (Hebrews 12:2); he had "nailed to the cross" the debt of sin that mankind owed to God (Colossians 2:14); thus humanity's sinful flesh "was crucified with him" (Romans 6:6); citing the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, 1 Peter says that Christ "bore our sins in his body on the cross" and that "by his wounds" we, that is the followers of Christ, are healed from sin (2:24). Thus, without denying or minimizing the fact that Christ was "crucified in weakness" (2 Corinthians 13:4) and that this was outwardly an offense, a stumbling block, and foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:23), the crucifixion of Christ was interpreted as showing the power of God to overcome death (1 Corinthians 1:17-18, 23-24). Instead of defeat, it was a sign of victory and triumph (Colossians 2:15).<sup>9</sup>

Paul repeatedly said that his own preaching was centered on Jesus whom he openly and "clearly portrayed as crucified" (Galatians 3:1). He saw this emphasis as appropriate and necessary because of the central theological importance of

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<sup>8</sup> See for example Cicero's description of crucifixion as "the most miserable and most painful punishment, appropriate to slaves alone" (*Against Veres* 2.5.66, 169). Though somewhat outdated, see the still useful study of Martin Hengel on *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (HENGEL 1977).

<sup>9</sup> Note that Col. 2:15 speaks of "triumphing" in its Roman sense of a victory parade. Such a parade, in which an army commander and his troops, together with the captured enemies and booty, were paraded through the streets of Rome, was the highest honor voted by the Roman senate to a commander, and was the most elaborate public exhibition of Rome's total domination of its enemies. Hence, Paul is here not only saying that Christ gained a victory over the world's "rulers and authorities," but rather that the cross brought ultimate and total victory over his enemies.

Christ's atoning death within the Christian worldview, but also, in part, because of the inherently paradoxical nature of Christ's crucifixion as a victory symbol, something that was not easy for new believers to wrap their heads around. That this paradox was understood just as much by non-Christians is demonstrated by the famous second- or third-century graffito found near the Palatine Hill in Rome which depicts a man named Alexamenos worshipping an ass-headed man being crucified.<sup>10</sup> Everyone in the Roman Empire knew what crucifixion was and why it was applied. During his ministry Jesus could say in a totally different context, "Whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27). This certainly was not meant to sound like good news to his followers.

Despite this fact, the cross soon became the central iconic symbol of the Christian faith. We should not be misled by the fact that there are but a handful of early representations of the cross in the surviving iconography of the first four centuries of the Christian era—far outnumbered by anchors, doves, and people in prayer (*orantes*). Written testimonies make clear the centrality of the cross as a symbol of the faith. About the same time as someone in Rome was scrawling that mocking picture of Alexamenos and his god, Tertullian of Carthage wrote that Christians were already using the cross in many of the same ways, as it was used by Christians in China in the 1281 notice cited earlier from Moule.

In all our actions, when we go in or out, when we put on our clothes or take a bath, at table, in bed, if we take a chair or a lamp, we make the sign of the cross on our forehead. These practices are not commanded by a formal law of Scripture, but tradition teaches them, usage confirms them, and faith preserves them (*De Corona Militis*, 3). During a period when it was unsafe to display a cross on one's wall or tombstone, the remembrance of the Messiah's death on a cross and its significance was constantly reinforced among believers by a hand gesture that left no trace for prosecutors to use.

A half-century earlier in Italy, Justin had written that the cross was "the greatest sign of the strength and power of Christ." He wrote that the Christians of his day saw the cross everywhere they looked in their daily lives.

Can one travel over the sea if this 'trophy', called the sail, is not firmly fixed on the boat? Can the earth be ploughed without the cross? Can laborers and diggers carry out their work without tools of this shape? Man himself differs from other animals precisely because he stands upright and can extend his hands, and because the nose, the organ for breathing, outlines a cross in the middle of his face (*First Apology* 55.1-6).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The image, inscription and translation can be seen at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexamenos\\_graffito](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexamenos_graffito). (retrieved 7.10.2021). For interpretation, see JENSEN 2000, 134.

<sup>11</sup> Translation adapted from YOUSIF 1978, 57.

Thus, the cross and what happened on it remained central to the early Christians even though it was only rarely depicted pictorially.

### **The Cross in Syriac Christianity**

Mesopotamians would have had no problem identifying with the shame and pain of crucifixion, as it (and impalement) had been practiced in Persia on and off for over a half-millennium before Christ (Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.128.2; 3.132.2; and 3.159.1). Indeed, the death of the local prophet Mani (c. A.D. 275) was reported by his followers as occurring via crucifixion. Mesopotamians who became Christians would have immediately recognized the paradox of the Messiah's death on a cross and the counter-intuitive theology that explained its necessity. But, as in the Greek and Latin churches, the cross was not connected only with Christ's suffering and death, but also with his resurrection. The cross became central as an iconographic symbol and as a sacrament in its liturgical use. The cross of Christ was seen as a hermeneutical tool as it was prefigured throughout the Old Testament, as well as being at the center of New Testament theology.<sup>12</sup> The paradox of the cross was also evident to Syriac theologians. In his *Commentary on the Prologue of John*, Philoxenos of Mabbug (d. 523) wrote: "The cross is the sign of God's weakness, as the creation and management of everything is a sign of His power. The fruits of both make it clear that what the weakness has accomplished is greater than what the power has done."<sup>13</sup>

The fourth-century hymns of St. Ephrem provide earlier evidence for the importance of the cross in the Syriac-speaking church outside the Roman Empire. In his poetic stanzas he uses the same picture as Justin of a ship's mast and yardarm forming a cross; he then adds that stretched out oars make a similar picture (*Hymns of Faith* 18, st. 7-9). Even a bird with its outstretched wings likewise proclaims the cross (*ibid.*, st. 6). In Hymn 17 he praises Jesus, the son of a carpenter, for creating everything in the shape of the cross.<sup>14</sup> Another picture used by Ephrem is the cross as pointer to the four cardinal directions. In Hymn 17 Jesus is said to have used the cross "as a vehicle by which to travel to the four quarters of the world" (st. 8), while in Hymn 18 "the Gospel message flew to the four quarters of the globe by the power of the Cross" (st. 3).<sup>15</sup>

The fifth-century theologian Narsai carries on this interpretational tradition. In his metrical Homily 30 he extols the virtues of the cross: The world as a whole, made of four directions, shows the sign of the cross. The year is sustained by four seasons like the cross, and, if delayed in one, it will not be complete.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> For a comprehensive overview, see KARIM 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Translation of KARIM 2004, 110.

<sup>14</sup> YOUSIF 1978, 53-55. His translation of the entire hymn is reproduced in KARIM 2004, 97-98.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 53, 55. The Syriac texts can be found in BECK 1955.

<sup>16</sup> Adapted from the translation in KARIM 2004, 91.



A few years later, Jacob of Serugh reminded his listeners of how the sign of the cross was made during their baptism: “With the oil they have signed thee, with the cross of light thy face is signed.”<sup>17</sup> When theologians of the Church of the East drew up a list of its seven sacraments, the sign of the cross was included, testifying to its spiritual centrality. Unlike the Latin church, however, the cross, when depicted in the religious art of the Church of the East, was most often bare.<sup>18</sup> Thus it represented not only the suffering and atoning of the Messiah but also the victory achieved by that suffering.<sup>19</sup> As Klimkeit concludes, “in the Nestorian-East Christian tradition the symbol [of the cross] primarily points to the risen, transfigured Christ who has overcome death. As a triumphal and victory cross, it is at the same time a symbol of Christ’s *parousia* and also the completion of all mysteries.”<sup>20</sup> The cross was so central in the Syriac church that Narsai had to make a disclaimer about worshipping the “wood”:

Those led astray thought that the Holy Church worships the wood,  
and that She honors it as a God instead of God.  
The Church does not bow down to a visible material,  
but to the sign of the Crucified King who conquered on the cross.  
If the Church worships the wood as they think,  
why then does it make the cross from other materials? (*Homily 30*).<sup>21</sup>

### The Cross in Tang China

In 638, three years after presenting himself at the Tang dynasty court, the Syriac monk Aluoben was given imperial sanction to officially organize a Christian presence in China. A physical cross was certainly among the images which his clergy brought from Persia and presented for inspection, together with their sacred books, to the imperial examiners.<sup>22</sup> However, the connotations of such an image were totally different in China where crucifixion was not a part of Chinese penal practice. Under the Tang, criminal punishments were codified and tightly controlled. The surviving Tang legal code designates the five main categories of punishment (from lesser to greater) as 1) beating with a light stick; 2) beating

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<sup>17</sup> CONNOLLY 1908, 281.

<sup>18</sup> Several Syriac manuscripts have crosses that bear a crucified Christ. The most famous example is the *Rabbula Gospels*. The *Grigorova Plate* (found in Anikova, Russia, but likely created in Zhetyssu-Semirechye region) also prominently shows a crucifixion. See the article of Charles STEWART in this volume and his fig. 10.

<sup>19</sup> On the sign of the cross as a sacrament in the Church of the East, cf. ROYEL 2011, 327-347; see also KARIM 2004, *passim*.

<sup>20</sup> KLIMKEIT 2002, 260.

<sup>21</sup> Translation in KARIM 2004, 96.

<sup>22</sup> Taizong’s decree of 638 mentions specifically that the Christians brought books and images (經像) and had them approved by the imperial bureaus. This decree is preserved in both the Xi’an stele (columns 11.9-13.5) and in the *Tang Huiyao* 唐會要, 49. On the *Tang Huiyao* text of the decree and its variant reading 經教 cf. FORTE 1996, 349-367. On the variant see *ibid.*, 352, n. 7.

with a heavy stick; 3) imprisonment; 4) exile; and 5) death. In that final category, strangulation (絞 *jiǎo*) was the normal method, with decapitation (斬 *zhǎn*) reserved for the most heinous offenses.<sup>23</sup> Since a person's body came, as it were, from one's parents, the latter punishment was extremely offensive in Chinese culture, for mutilation of the body was seen as a breach of filial piety.<sup>24</sup> It should further be noted that the death penalty was considered a last resort. For example, the *Zizhi Tongjian* (vol. 193) mentions that in A.D. 629 there were only 29 people sentenced to death across all of China.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the idea of executing someone by nailing him to a cross would have been both novel and repugnant to the Chinese populace. This would be doubly so if the judge who presided at his trial had declared that he had found no criminal activity deserving of death and was merely allowing the accusers to have their own way. Crucifixion would have spoken as negatively about the authorities who perpetrated it as about the person who endured it.

The cross, therefore, did not represent the same paradox that it did in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern worlds. This created a predicament for Christian missionaries. The Messiah's atonement was so central to Christian theology that it precluded any attempts to delete or even downplay the crucifixion. Yet as Gillman and Klimkeit have noted, "The crucifixion, and the post-Anselmic interpretations placed upon it by European Christians, remains a stumbling block for some Asians to this day. It may be that the early Nestorians had already divined this."<sup>26</sup>

Yet even the most basic message of the cross—that the willing death of the sinless Son of God was a necessary vicarious act which had atoned for man's sin and allowed God to offer men free forgiveness and a path to eternal life—that message would have to be patiently taught, together with its background in Roman culture, in order to be properly understood. The cross could not be the starting point; it would have to be the culmination of Christian instruction. It could not serve as a "teaser"; it would be better to keep it as a mystery shared only with serious seekers and in addresses to the faithful.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. JOHNSON 1979, 49-59.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 59-60, n. 74.

<sup>25</sup> See link (last retrieved 30.9.2021):

<https://zh.wikisource.org/wiki/%E8%B3%87%E6%B2%BB%E9%80%9A%E9%91%91/%E5%8D%B7193> (retrieved 20.10.2021)

<sup>26</sup> GILLMAN & KLIMKEIT 1999, 348, n. 45. In another context, Klimkeit has shown that the idea of a suffering savior eventually penetrated China also in Manichaean and Buddhist theologies and was then linked at times to the image of the cross. But this was clearly at a later date and required these groups to confront the same lack of cultural empathy with the symbol. Cf. KLIMKEIT 2002, esp. 266-275.

### The Cross and the Xi'an Stele

One might interpret the Xi'an stele in just this way. A cross provocatively (yet not very prominently) surmounts the gigantic stone, yet its meaning, as Stang points out, is not explained in the text. The Chinese character which is shaped like a cross, 十 *shí*, normally indicates the number ten, although it can at times also indicate completeness or perfection. Besides its numerical use, it is only mentioned in two passages on the stele where Stang thinks it “forwards a distinctive theology of the cross.”<sup>27</sup> Stang (with Max Deeg) translates the first passage (3.11) to say that the Christian God Aluohe “measured out the character ‘ten’ and fixed the four cardinal directions” (判十字以定四方 *pàn shí zì yǐ dìng sì fāng*). Stang sees this as part of a Sinified re-telling of the Genesis 1 creation story.<sup>28</sup> As I have pointed out elsewhere, the title of the stele (in col. 1) makes it clear that we should read coll. 3-26 as a commentary (序 *shù*) on or detailed explanation of the concluding poem (頌 *sòng*, coll. 26-30).<sup>29</sup> This commentary on Genesis 1, as Stang interprets these lines, thus elaborates on the poem's two lines: “Like a craftsman, he began to create; he brought forth the earth and set the sky in place” (權輿匠化, 起地立天, 26.11-12). Thus, the Stang/Deeg interpretation is accurate, and here the “cross character” is being used in its pictorial sense as separating space into four sections, either the four cardinal directions or the four corners of the world. Note that Eccles and Lieu give a broader (and more prophetic) interpretation of this line: “He determined that the Figure of Ten (i.e. the Cross) should be planted throughout the world.” It may be that the author had also been thinking of the secondary meaning of 十 *shí*, i.e. “perfect”—that the creator fixed things perfectly, an interpretation in agreement with Christian theology which sees the original creation as “perfect” both in quality and in quantity (i.e. complete, Greek *telos*).

I disagree, however, with the thought that this is some innovation of the stele's author or of *Jingjiao* theology. As we have already seen, the association of the cross with the four directions or corners of the world is a motif found 500 years earlier in both Hymns 17 and 18 of St. Ephrem. In Hymn 17 he speaks of the cross as the vehicle by which Jesus travelled to the four quarters of the world (st. 8); in Hymn 18 we read:

Faith too grows up in three stages:  
once the Apostles believed in Father, Son and Spirit,  
then the Gospel message flew to the four quarters of the globe  
by the power of the Cross (st. 3).<sup>30</sup>

<sup>27</sup> STANG 2017, 110.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>29</sup> THOMPSON 2020, 161-193.

<sup>30</sup> Translation of YOUSIF 1978, 53.

Thus, the cross is associated with the four corners of the earth not only at the world's initial creation but also in its ultimate integration into the kingdom of God.

The stele's second reference to the "cross" character is in coll. 8.8-9, where the *Jingjiao*'s distinctive customs are being described. Stang and Deeg translate: "They have the character 'cross' as (their) seal (that) merges the 'four luminous (directions)' and unifies (them) without restriction" (印持十字, 融四照以合無拘). Eccles and Lieu render, "As his emblem, the cross is taken up; its image illuminates all directions to bring to unity those who do not believe." Stang's interpretation is thus that here also, by combining the cross with a reference to the four directions, the writer is connecting the cross "to the inaugural cosmogony, in which the cross is the grid that brings order to chaos."<sup>31</sup> However, the unity is here not specifically limited to, or even connected with, the original creation, but seems rather, as the Eccles and Lieu translation would favor, the cross's ability to bring order out of chaos through the preaching of the church, again reminding us of the verses of Ephrem. Nicolini-Zani agrees in his new translation: "The cross that [Christians monks] hold as an emblem makes the four horizons of the earth merge in its light, bringing together what was separated."<sup>32</sup>

Stang is technically correct in saying that these references to the cross are "not recalling anything specific to the Christ or Mishihe," and that they remove "the cross from the context of the death of the Mishihe."<sup>33</sup> But at this point we must again return to the nature of the monument and its text. As Stang himself points out, the stele is propagandistic in nature. Its purpose was to celebrate publicly the nearly 150 years of imperial favor that had allowed the *Jingjiao* to operate within the Middle Kingdom. In doing so it had to emphasize its connectivity and harmony with the imperial house of Tang, highlighting hyperbolically the latter's almost continuous goodwill, and glossing over euphemistically the periods when attempts were made to harm or suppress the church. In the process, it wished to give a general account of church teachings, but this had to be done in a non-offensive way. In fact, the stele text would certainly have had to undergo the scrutiny of imperial censors before permission would be given for the erection of a public text that included such sensitive religious and political history, a text

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<sup>31</sup> STANG 2017, 114.

<sup>32</sup> Matteo Nicolini-Zani has kindly shared with me the manuscript of his forthcoming *The Luminous Way to the East* (Oxford University Press). That volume is an enlarged and revised English version of his original Italian work titled *La via radiosa per l'oriente. I testi e la storia del primo incontro del cristianesimo con il mondo culturale e religioso cinese (secoli VII-IX)*, Edizioni Qiqajon, Magnano 2006, translated into English from Italian by William Skudlarek. The work will contain translations of all the major *Jingjiao* texts. Nicolini-Zani has kindly permitted me to cite the translation from the English version of the book, where noted in the following pages.

<sup>33</sup> STANG 2017, 114, 117.

carved in stone, built to last for centuries. The text's author, therefore, had the unenviable task of writing an intelligible and non-threatening text that would project a positive and acceptable image to non-Christian readers while at the same time remaining faithful to the doctrine, practice, and history of his own faith.

The erection and public dedication of the stele in 781 proves that the text passed imperial muster. A testimony in Syriac at the base of the text confirms that ecclesiastical approval for it was also received.<sup>34</sup> However this entire procedure makes it all the more necessary for us to be careful about any conclusions we might make about what the text does or does not contain, and how its message is phrased. Although it is the most famous of all the surviving *Jingjiao* texts, extreme caution must be exercised in using it as a guide to or summary of *Jingjiao* teaching, including its teaching about the importance and meaning of the cross. It tells the uninitiated that the cross is a key Christian symbol or seal (印 *yìn*), and that the Christian message is one that can bring harmony from chaos everywhere. The text describes the incarnation of the Messiah in some detail, which leads to his "initiating life and extinguishing death" (7.7) when "the Luminous sun (景日 *jǐng rì*) was hung (懸 *xuán*) to rout the darkness" (7.8). More detailed teaching about the cross was reserved for private catechetical instruction.

### The Cross in the Other *Jingjiao* Documents

While we know the *raison d'être* for the Xi'an stele, the same cannot be said for most of our other surviving documents from the Da Qin *Jingjiao*. Except for the clearly liturgical texts in the Pelliot manuscript, they are a miscellaneous collection that must have been produced for a variety of reasons and used in a variety of situations. Therefore, they too should not be looked upon as necessarily representative. They are, however, all we have, and from that point of view are of great value. Although some scholars still dispute the authenticity of a few of these documents, I will assume the authenticity of all except the so-called Kojima scroll(s). We will briefly review the role of the cross and its theology in each of these surviving texts.

The text *Xuting mishi suo jing* (序聽迷詩所經, *Book of the Lord Messiah*),<sup>35</sup> traditionally considered the earliest *Jingjiao* text, begins with a lengthy explanation of cosmological and moral teaching. The text as we have it (breaking off in mid-sentence in col. 170) concludes, however, with 55 lines that retell the life of the Messiah, from his incarnation through his resurrection (coll. 115-170).

<sup>34</sup> "In the year 1092 of the Greeks [= A.D. 781] My Lord Yazdbuzid, priest and Chorepiscopos of the metropolis Kumdān, son of the late priest Milis, from Balkh, a city of Tauristan [Tocharistan], set up this stone tablet; the things written on it are the law of our Savior and the preaching of our fathers to the emperors of Zinaye [the Chinese]." Syriac lines 3-13 in the numbering system of Eccles and Lieu. I have also slightly modified their translation, accessed at: <http://www.uai-iaa.org/content/files/85327507279917147.pdf> (retrieved 27.10.2021)

<sup>35</sup> No. 459 in SHOOKU 2012, vol. 6, description and photographs on 83-87.

In that section, evil men are described of whom it is said, “if they had believed this teaching, they would not have killed the Messiah” (148-49). Jesus’s trial is then described, with Pilate absolving the Messiah of any evil. Yet, the text continues:

彌師訶將身施與惡，	The Messiah delivered himself to the wicked,
為一切眾生，	for the benefit of all the living.
遣世間人等，	So that the inhabitants of the world
知共人命如轉燭，	might know that their lives are like a candle about to become extinct.
為今世眾生布施，代命受死。	[He] gave his life and suffered death as a ransom for the living of this world.
彌師訶將自身與，遂即受死。	The Messiah delivered himself up and suffered death.
惡業人乃將彌師訶別處， 向流上枋枋處，名為訖句， 即木上縛着。	The evil people led the Messiah to another place, to the place of execution, which is called Golgotha and bound him to the wood.
	(coll.161-165 in trans. Nicolini-Zani)

Here a detailed historical narrative of the crucifixion is combined with a brief exposition of its theological significance. While the cross character (十) is absent from this description (it does appear four times as a numeral in the text), it is clearly and accurately described by the “tree” or “wood” (木 mù) character in the final line.<sup>36</sup> Thus, the text does incorporate the cross and its theology in a culturally sensitive way where it would fit within a missional and catechetical scheme.

A second scroll has preserved three additional *Jingjiao* texts, collectively entitled *On the One God* 一神論 (*Yishen lun*). These texts also seem to arise during an early period of the church’s existence in China. The one that appears first on the surviving scroll is entitled 喻第二 *Yu di er* (*Metaphorical Teaching, Number Two*). It was a treatise meant to explain the nature and attributes of the one true God, especially his role as creator. The second treatise in the manuscript is 一天

<sup>36</sup> KARIM states, “The cross and the wood are interchangeable and very often synonymous” in the Syriac fathers (2004, 93). He devotes several pages to passages on the subject (93-96). At times the cross is also contrasted with the “wood” of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that was instrumental in the story of Adam and Eve’s sin.

論第一 *Yi tian lun diyi* (*On the One God, Number One*). It too spends much time on the nature of God, adding a lengthy discussion about the nature of man as well, including evil and Satan. Neither of these texts discusses the Messiah or his work, and so, as one would expect, they do not mention the cross or its purpose.

The third text in the scroll is 世尊佈施論,第三 *Shizun bushi lun disan* (*On the Almsgiving of the World-Honored One, Number Three*). It also makes no direct reference to the cross, either as the cross symbol or as the tree. However, the theology of the crucifixion and its import are taken up. The text begins with a lengthy Sinified recounting of much of the Sermon on the Mount (coll. 1-43). It then shifts abruptly from the words to the work of the Messiah, and specifically his arrest, trial, suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension (coll. 44-125). The last section then describes the spread of the Gospel by the Messiah's disciples with the help of the Holy Spirit (Pure Wind), and how this will be followed by the ultimate judgment of all men (coll. 126-198).

In the description of the Messiah's trial, death, and resurrection, the Jews testify to the fact that he had called himself the "Son of the Venerable One" and had even stated, "I am the Messiah" (50). Declaring this to be blasphemy, the Jews arrested him and brought him before the Roman leader. The latter did not agree with the charges, yet eventually handed him over to be killed. He should not have died in the flesh since he was not guilty of anything (68-69), yet he was executed. Five times the manner of his death is specified with the description that he "was suspended on high" (上懸高 *shàng xuán gāo*, 45, 54, 55, 73, 78).<sup>37</sup> The text further states that he went like a lamb to the slaughter, and when, in accord with the sentence, his body was hung (當身上自), "in his love he bore [all things] for you" (66-67).<sup>38</sup> Through this work of the Messiah, Adam's offspring can be forgiven. "This was [in fact] the way it should be: that the Messiah should suffer, and that [he] should act in weakness so that others would [no longer] be subject to weakness" (71-72). "He suffered death; that on the third day his body rose from death, ... and went up to heaven" (121-122). Thus, this text explains with accuracy both the nature of the crucifixion and its theology while never mentioning the cross.

The text entitled *Book on Unveiling the Origin and Attaining the Source* 宣元至本經 (*Xuanyuan zhiben jing*) has been preserved in both a Dunhuang manuscript and (part of it) on the more recently discovered Luoyang Pillar. On the latter, we find the distinctive *Jingjiao* cross portrayed graphically at the top of two of its eight sides. The text, however, concentrates on early cosmology and has no

<sup>37</sup> Nicolini-Zani/Shudlarek's translation of these passages: "he had to be lifted up" (45); was "[condemned] to be lifted up" (54) and "he would be lifted up" (55); he was "lifted on high at the appointed time and thus gave up his life" (73); "the Messiah was lifted on high" (78).

<sup>38</sup> These are also the translations of NICOLINI-ZANI/SHUDLAREK, *The Luminous Way*.

reference to the cross or crucifixion. The same is true of the text entitled *Book on Mysterious Peace and Blessedness* 志玄安樂經 (*Zhixuan anle jing*).<sup>39</sup> Nor is the cross mentioned in the two texts in the famous Pelliot chinois 3847 manuscript—the *Praise Hymn on the Salvation Obtained by the Trinity* 三威蒙度讚 (*Sanwei mengdu zan*) and the *Book of the Honored* 尊經 (*Zun jing*). However, none of these texts were specifically dealing with subject matter where the crucifixion would be expected to be mentioned. For instance, the Trinity hymn in the Pelliot manuscript has been identified as a Chinese version of the liturgical hymn known in other traditions as the *Gloria in Excelsis*. The crucifixion is not mentioned in any of the versions of that hymn. And yet the crucifixion is implicit in the Chinese text as it implores mercy from the Messiah who “hast saved countless beings; ...the King of eternal life, merciful and blessed Lamb...who has not rejected suffering” (13-14).<sup>40</sup>

The difficulty in drawing conclusions about the theology of the *Jingjiao* and what was influencing it can be illustrated further by the image of a boat. Early in the poem on the Xi’an stele, Christianity’s early fruits in China are described, including the depiction that “the living and the dead were transported by the boat [of mercy]” (27.9). The prose portion expands on this line when it says that the Messiah “sitting at the oars of the boat of mercy, made the beings endowed with a soul ascend to the Luminous Palace, and they were thus brought to salvation” (7.10-8.1). In his note on the passage, Nicolini-Zani aptly describes how in Buddhism souls are thought to reach their liberated existence in nirvana by means of “Guanyin (in Sanskrit Avalokiteśvara), the bodhisattva of mercy,” also called the “boat of mercy.” He further notes, however, that “this image of salvation as the ‘boat of mercy’ or ‘oars of mercy’ is also very prominent in Syriac Christian literature.”<sup>41</sup> Taking this further, we can note, as Karim did, that the cross is spoken of as a “vehicle” for salvation in the Syriac tradition. Ephrem says, “How fair is the cross, the vehicle of the Son, of its Lord.”<sup>42</sup> Jacob of Serugh has Jesus saying, “This cross has become a vehicle for me towards the dead, and by it I brought back all the captivity away from the thief.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, the writer of the stele text has again incorporated language that would communicate the Christian claims of providing salvation in a way that was in accord with Syriac tradition at the same time as it was tapping into Chinese Buddhist imagery.

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<sup>39</sup> It is possible, however, that the reference in coll. 80-83 which speaks of “a close relative who with a ladder climbs the tree for you in order to help you get the fruit that cures disease” is a reference to the crucifixion.

<sup>40</sup> Translation of NICOLINI-ZANI/SHUDLAREK, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> See in particular the note of NICOLINI-ZANI/SHUDLAREK’s on columns 7-8 in *The Luminous Way* (forthcoming).

<sup>42</sup> Hymns on Paradise VI,6, cited by KARIM 2004, 111.

<sup>43</sup> From his second homily on St. Thomas, in the translation of KARIM 2004, 112.



Thus, the absence of specific references to the cross and to the crucifixion of the Messiah in some of these Tang-era documents should not be viewed as some sort of attempt at a cover-up of the symbol or its theology. It was rather a strategic and pedagogical decision that the cross as an icon would be stressed only during catechetical and liturgical instruction. *On Almsgiving* may well have been one of the texts used to instruct those inquiring about the faith or those preparing for baptism. Even during catechesis, the cross might remain a stumbling block and foolishness to many Chinese; however, there was no need to make it one before the church had an opportunity to give a detailed explanation of it.<sup>44</sup>

### **The Cross in *Yelikewen* Christianity**

Unfortunately, we do not have a body of Christian literary texts from the Yuan period, or a public text like that of the Xi'an stele, as we do for the Tang era.<sup>45</sup> What we do have is a considerable body of archaeological evidence, consisting of gravestones and funerary markers erected by Christians and small bronze "Nestorian crosses." Virtually the only iconographic symbol found on the several hundred Christian gravestones is a prominent cross. Several thousand of the small "Nestorian" or "Ordos crosses" (from the area of northern China where they originated) have survived.<sup>46</sup> A significant number of the surviving examples feature crosses, even though these may not be in the majority. The simplest explanation for the variety in design is the religious mix to be found among the tribes from which they originate. That Christians would often, if not exclusively, feature a cross on their possessions, and that others would feature totem animals or Buddhist or other religious symbols, and that still others would choose a mix, is exactly what one would expect from a religiously mixed tribal environment. Yet, sorting out the religious attribution of some of the non-cross bronzes may prove even more difficult than is currently thought. For example, it has been long noted that some of the bird-shaped examples are indeed cross-shaped. As we have seen earlier, a Syriac Christian tradition, dating back at least as far as St. Ephrem, viewed a bird with outspread wings as the sign of the cross. Narsai developed this picture still further in his Homily 30:

Look at the bird flying in the air, how by its body,  
it portrays the cross and shows it to the multitudes.

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<sup>44</sup> Klimkeit notes that associating the cross with divine suffering which redeems life is an extension of meaning that "is particularly obvious in the Manichaean and Buddhist art of Inner Asia." See KLIMKEIT 2002, 259-283.

<sup>45</sup> There are some small but important indications that the second flowering of the Church of the East's presence in China was not totally disconnected from the *Jingjiao* of the Tang period, as has been often assumed. Among that evidence is the similarity in the iconographic depiction of the cross, with the expanding arms and top, and with three pearls at the end of each, as depicted on the Xi'an stele. This has been found on numerous Yuan-era gravestones.

<sup>46</sup> On these, see most recently TAVEIRNE 2020.

It stretches out its head, extends its legs and spreads its wings,  
 then the pure air carries it on its back.  
 This is a mystery that whoever believes in Jesus' sign  
 will fly in the day of resurrection and ascend into heaven.  
 And whoever is not baptized and does not form the cross on himself  
 remains on earth and the door of mercies will be closed to him.<sup>47</sup>

Was this picture also used by preachers among the Turkic tribesmen—men who saw birds on a daily basis in their life on the steppes? If so, this might account for some of the variation in the Ordos “crosses.” In any case, the cross was certainly neither an unused nor a secret symbol among the Christians during this period.

Wolfgang Hage's article on shamanism and Christianity in Central Asia collected numerous examples of the Christian cross's use among the Central Asian tribes during the *Yelikewen* period<sup>48</sup> He concluded that the pervasive traditional shamanistic religion of these tribes remained an element within the spiritual lives of many Turkic Christians. He saw them turning to shamanistic spells when the need arose for them and their property to be protected from evil spirits, while at the same time adopting Christianity in order to obtain eternal bliss. The use of the cross as a “mere amulet,” Christian burials with mixed pagan grave goods, intermarriage between Christians and non-Christians, and the observation of travelers such as William of Rubruck are all marshalled in support of this conclusion. While there undoubtedly was such a mixture among sections of the population, this is exactly what one finds in other situations where Christianity is introduced and becomes a religion of a minority of the population. What percentage of the Christians fit that description? What percentage of burials display mixed grave goods, and can such goods always be properly characterized as pagan or Christian? What percentage of people who displayed crosses on their bodies did so because of their apotropaic power rather than as an identifier of that person's religion? Or, as with crosses worn today, was it often a bit of both? Hage's main point is, however, valid. Many, or even most, of the Central Asian steppe-dwellers of this period never replaced their traditional shamanistic beliefs with Christianity; others merely added some Christian beliefs to their tribal religion and no doubt viewed the cross as a powerful talisman. Yet the misuse of the cross by some does not equate to a change in its meaning within the church. It was always easy to misinterpret the sign of the cross. Ephrem wrote centuries earlier in a hymn, “Mark your dead with the cross, so that they will overcome the second death” (Nisibene Hymn 78).<sup>49</sup> An observer in Syria might have explained

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<sup>47</sup> KARIM 2004, 100.

<sup>48</sup> HAGE 1976, 114-124. In another article Hage blamed the religious tolerance among the Turks as helping shamanism outlast Christianity in the region and producing a syncretism among Christians, even though this was “not an expression of conscious accommodation as a missionary method.” See HAGE 1982, 110-112.

<sup>49</sup> KARIM 2004, 144.

this custom as apotropaic as well. Yet there is no evidence that this was in the mind of the author.

As Moule has long-since pointed out, the Yuan-era Christian monasteries were referred to in Chinese documents as “monasteries of the cross” (十字寺 *shízì sì*). The cross’ ubiquitous appearance on funerary inscriptions also makes clear that it was associated with death and resurrection, not solely with creation or the four corners of the world. Moule cited the Chinese *Gazetteer of Zhenjiang of the Zhishun Period* (1329-1332) to confirm the importance of the cross for the *Yelikewen*, but also its geographical connotations:

The figure of ten 十 ... is an image of the human body. It is set up in houses, painted in churches, worn upon the head, and hung on the breast. Adherents consider it an indicator of the four quarters, the zenith and nadir....; *Yelikewen* is the name of their religion.<sup>50</sup>

That a non-Christian Chinese historiographer interpreted the meaning of the “cross” in more traditional geographical terms is what should be expected. One should not conclude, however, that this is conclusive evidence that this was also the central understanding of the symbol in the *Yelikewen*’s own worldview.<sup>51</sup> There is some evidence that this author had not researched his subject thoroughly, for a few lines earlier he also records a *Yelikewen* church that has a pillar that hangs in the air! What the passage does show us is that even outsiders came to understand that the cross was the central iconographic symbol of Christians, even if they did not properly understand its meaning. Elsewhere in this present volume is the thorough study of the iconography of the cross in Central Asia during this period by Charles Stewart. He concludes that the various understandings of the cross found in the Byzantine and Syriac churches were maintained in the Syriac-speaking community over the centuries as their faith spread across Asia—including as a symbol of Christ’s sacrificial death and of the Christian’s victory over death.<sup>52</sup>

We get the same picture from the western missionaries and travelers of the period. William of Rubruck was always skeptical, and frequently disdainful, of the quality of doctrine and practice among the “Nestorian” Christians he met in Central Asia and China during his stay there (c. 1253). He describes the amazement of the local Christians when they saw his crucifix, for “Nestorians and Armenians never put the figure of Christ on their crosses which gives the

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<sup>50</sup> Adapted from YIN 2009, 306-309. Yin has adapted the earlier translations of Moule (1930, 145-150) and Saeki (1937, 511-515).

<sup>51</sup> MOULE 1931 seems to draw that conclusion (and possibly also KLIMKEIT 2002), but he can only give the propagandistic Xi’an stele text and this non-Christian Chinese text as evidence for the cross “as cosmic symbol” among the Chinese Christians.

<sup>52</sup> See STEWART 2022, 145-181.

impression that they have wrong ideas about the Passion or are ashamed of it” [*videntur male sentire de passione, vel erubescunt eam*] (15.7). Yet later William saw a jewel-studded silver cross brought from Jerusalem by an Armenian before which a young Christian woman “prostrated herself on the ground and adored it with great devotion.” William then adds, “for she had been well instructed in this respect” [*prostravit se in terra et adoravit eam valde devote, quia bene docta erat in hoc*]; it too had “no figure of the Savior, for the Armenians and Nestorians are ashamed to see Christ nailed to the cross” [*ut appareat Christus affixus cruci*] (29.33-34).<sup>53</sup>

### The Cross in Chinese Mission Work

Interestingly, the 17<sup>th</sup>-century Jesuit mission in China was attacked with very similar accusations. In 1637, the first two Franciscans arrived in Peking. One of the resident Jesuits, Johann Adam Schall, was appalled by their methodology, writing that although neither friar could speak Chinese, both were ready to “jump up on benches with their crucifixes in hand” to preach the gospel.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, the Franciscans and other orders showed an equal contempt for the practices of the Jesuits, attacking, among other things, their failure to preach the doctrine of the crucifixion. However, this charge was patently misleading. The Jesuits did, of course, preach about the crucifixion of the Messiah, but they did so without making a wide public display of the crucifix. They had adopted this practice for many of the same reasons as the *Jingjiao*. The crucifixion and its theological meaning were still reserved for catechesis. Even then, however, they warned that crucifixes were often viewed among their converts as being similar to Daoist amulets, and that images and beads were seen as having the same potency as those in Buddhist popular practice.<sup>55</sup> Brockey writes:

The centrality of devotional objects to Chinese popular piety was a fortunate coincidence for the Jesuits, and made it possible for the missionaries to substitute common European Catholic objects such as rosaries, *nominas*, *veronicas*, and *agnus dei* pendants for their indigenous counterparts without much explanation. Holy water and symbolic gestures such as the sign of the cross were also elements of the spiritual arsenal that the Jesuits shared with their neophytes. In one account from the wilds of Shanxi Province, where Alfonso Vagnone went on mission in the 1630s, the sign of the cross was lauded as an effective protection against ravenous wolves—except, that is, in the case of two Christians “who were publicly held to be less than observant of the Ten Commandments.” This pair saw

<sup>53</sup> Modified translation from that of DAWSON 1966, 119 and 166. The Latin texts are found in WYNGAERT 1929, 203 and 264. It should be noted that Rubruck’s observations are not always accurate. Armenian art, for example, often depicts the crucifixion. Thus, we should also be measured in accepting his other conclusions.

<sup>54</sup> BROCKEY 2007, 104, where he cites the letter of Schall to Alexandre de Rhodes, 8 Nov. 1637.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 96-97.

their two children eaten before their eyes in spite of their holy gesticulations.<sup>56</sup>

Vagnone was not happy about the use of Christian phrases and objects as magical talismans, nor is there evidence that this was either what the Jesuits taught or the attitude of the laity in general. Yet, Moule was probably right in saying (as quoted above in our introduction) that at least some Tang-era Christians saw the cross as having “magical significance” and that they used it as a charm. This should not lead to the conclusion that the *Jingjiao* either taught or encouraged such a belief, or that it was the normal understanding of the cross. Since making the sign of the cross was one of the sacraments in the Church of the East, however, Chinese Christians would have acknowledged a certain power in it.

Yet, because there were such problems even among the converted, it is easy to see why the Jesuits did not feature the crucifix in their initial contacts with Chinese who were totally ignorant of Christianity and its tenets. The comparative success of the Jesuits in contrast to the other Roman Catholic mission groups might indicate that their reservation of the cross for a later level of instruction was one part of a sound mission strategy. I would argue that the Syriac-speaking monks quickly developed a similar understanding to that of the later Jesuits, and a similar strategy. Their results may also have been similar—a modest number of converts. In neither case, however, should the strategy be interpreted as a minimizing of the Messiah’s death and its theological significance, nor a change in its meaning. Karim’s study supports his conclusion that “one can justly say that Syriac theology is truly a theology of the cross.”<sup>57</sup> The events on Golgotha on Good Friday were not only viewed as central to the church’s theology of atonement, but also intertwine with virtually all other aspects of its Christology (from the incarnation to the resurrection and ascension), soteriology (from Eden to the second coming), and ecclesiology (in its many liturgical uses). There is no reason to believe that the daughter church in China would not have held the cross and crucifixion in equally high regard, and would have joined Narsai in saying: The cross of Jesus is the seal of our faith, by which His divine Economy was accomplished for our salvation (Homily 30).<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 96-97.

<sup>57</sup> KARIM 2004, 154.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 127.

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THE HUMANITY OF CHRIST IN THE *JINGJIAO* DUNHUANG  
MANUSCRIPT *DISCOURSE ON THE ONE GOD*

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**I. Introduction**

The cosmopolitan Tang Dynasty (618-907) witnessed the spread of the East Syriac Christianity<sup>1</sup> in China from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 10<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to the sources composed by the Syriac Christians in the Middle East concerning the missions to China, literary materials and other monuments discovered in China have made it possible for us to understand and even to reconstruct, to a certain degree, what the East Syriac Christianity, or, to refer to its Chinese name, Jingjiao 景教,<sup>2</sup> looked like in Tang China. Among those literary materials written in classical Chinese, the most famous one is undoubtedly the text inscribed on the so-called Xi'an Stele.<sup>3</sup> Besides this stele, seven manuscripts about Jingjiao,

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<sup>1</sup> The East Syriac Church, also known as the Church of the East, dates back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Syriac-speaking Christians living in the Persian Empire. This unique geographical position outside the Roman Empire partly explains its particular theological tradition. The Church of the East gradually gained its independence after the Christological controversies of the 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> century. It follows strictly the dyophysite ('two-nature') Christology of Theodore of Mopsuestia, but was misleadingly labeled as "Nestorian" by its theological opponents. See Sebastian P. Brock, and James F. Coakley, "Church of the East," in BROCK-BUTTS-KIRAZ-VAN ROMPAY 2011, 99-100.

<sup>2</sup> Jingjiao 景教 is usually understood to mean the "religion of light" or "luminous religion". It consists of two Chinese characters: the character jing 景 in classical Chinese has various meanings such as light, greatness, and esteem; the meaning of jiao 教 can be teaching or doctrine. In short, the exact connotation of the term Jingjiao and the reason why those East Syrian missionaries chose this term as a self-designation are still unclear. For a detailed analysis of this term, see FERREIRA 2014, 210-211.

<sup>3</sup> In 1623 or 1625, a stele inscribed in Chinese and Syriac, entitled as Monument on the Propagation of the Luminous Religion of Daqin in China (Daqin Jingjiao liuxing zhongguo bei 大秦景教流行中国碑) was unearthed in the vicinity of Xi'an, China. According to the colophon carved on the stele, it was erected in 781. This stele is a witness to the spread of the East Syrian Christianity in China during the Tang Dynasty (618-907), whose discovery also signifies the beginning of research on the Tang Christianity.



discovered in Dunhuang,<sup>4</sup> came to light in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their titles are:<sup>5</sup>

1. *Xuting mishisuo jing* 序听迷诗所经 [Book of Jesus-Messiah]
2. *Yishenlun* 一神论 [Discourse on the One God]
3. *Daqin Jingjiao sanwei mengdu zan* 大秦景教三威蒙度赞 [Hymn in Adoration of the Holy Trinity]
4. *Zunjing* 尊经 [Book of Honour or [list of] ‘Venerable Books]
5. *Zhixuan anle jing* 志玄安乐经 [Book on Attaining Profound Peace and Joy]
6. *Daqin Jingjiao xuanyuan zhiben jing* 大秦景教宣元至本经 [Book of Proclamation of the Highest Origin of Origins]
7. *Daqin Jingjiao dasheng tongzhen guifa zan* 大秦景教大圣通真归法赞 [Hymn of Praise for the Transfiguration of Our Lord]

More recently, in 2006, an octagonal pillar, whose form resembles the Buddhist *dhāraṇī* pillars, was unearthed in Luoyang.

So far, a lot of ink has been spilled on the Xi’an Stele, while the other Chinese Jingjiao texts are less explored, thus leaving scholars with much yet to discover. Regarding the seven Dunhuang manuscripts, complete English translations have been provided by both P.Y. Saeki and Li Tang.<sup>6</sup> In the Chinese scholarship, Weng Shaojun annotates the texts on the monument together with the seven Dunhuang manuscripts.<sup>7</sup> Later on, Nie Zhijun and Wang Lanping both conduct substantial textual analysis on these documents.<sup>8</sup> The English translations and the detailed Chinese annotations certainly contribute to our deeper understanding of these texts and lay the foundation for future research. It is now widely acknowledged that a common phenomenon often observed in these texts is the borrowing of Chinese religious (Chinese Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism) terms to explain the Christian doctrines. Basing on the previous studies of the Chinese Jingjiao texts, one may ask further questions: how to interpret these texts? What do they reflect about the larger contexts behind them and how do the larger contexts help us better understand these texts? Last but not least, how to deal with the

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<sup>4</sup> Located on the western edge of Gansu province, China, Dunhuang is a supply city on the Silk Road during Tang Dynasty. The manuscripts found in the Dunhuang Cave date from 5<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

<sup>5</sup> Scholars often render these titles in different ways, hence we now have various translations of these titles. Here I follow the translation of Hidemi Takahashi. See TAKAHASHI in KING, ed. 2018, 626-629.

<sup>6</sup> See SAEKI 1937, TANG 2002

<sup>7</sup> See WENG 翁绍军 1996.

<sup>8</sup> See NIE 聂志军 2010; WANG 王兰平 2016.

interactions between the East Syriac Christianity and the Chinese religions in these texts?

This paper deals with a Buddhist term *wuyin* 五荫, which was used to denote the humanity of Christ in one of the *Jingjiao* Dunhuang manuscripts *Yishenlun* 一神论 [Discourse on the One God]. I will first introduce the general aspects of this text, discuss the meaning of *wuyin* within this text, explore the connotation of *wuyin* in the Chinese Buddhist context, and analyze the discussion of the humanity of Christ in the East Syriac theological tradition. The study of the term *wuyin* serves as an entrance to my further analysis of the phenomenon of religious borrowing and mixing that happens frequently in the *Jingjiao* Dunhuang texts. I hope to employ the theory of translation studies to discuss and evaluate the process in which the East Syriac missionaries, by borrowing Chinese religious terms, translated their theology for their Chinese audience.

## II. The Manuscript of *Yishenlun* [Discourse on the One God]

Among the seven Dunhuang manuscripts, *Xuting mishisuo jing* 序听迷诗所经 [Book of Jesus-Messiah] and *Yishenlun* 一神论 [Discourse on the One God] belong to the early Tang Christian texts. Most scholars have attributed these two manuscripts to bishop Aluoben 阿罗本 and his disciples, who, according to the inscription on the Xi'an Stele, arrived at Chang'an (the capital city of the Tang Dynasty, today's Xi'an) in 635 with Christian scriptures.<sup>9</sup> Hidemi Takahashi summarizes nicely the backdrop of the production of these early Tang Christian texts:

From the Xi'an Stele, as well as the transcript of the official record in *Tang huiyao* (*juan* 49, p. 864), we learn that in 638 Aluoben was granted permission by emperor Taizong (626–649) to establish a monastery in Chang'an after an examination of his teachings. For the imperial authorities to examine the doctrines of the new religion, materials must have been made available in Chinese, and it is often assumed that two of the *Jingjiao* documents from Dunhuang, *Xuting mishisuo jing* and *Yishenlun*, which share an unpolished Chinese style and are more 'biblical' in content than the other *Jingjiao* documents, were among the materials presented to the imperial court on that occasion.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> It remains uncertain when Syriac Christians first arrived in China. And Aluoben is the only name we know of a Christian missionary who arrived in China with the first Christian mission. The stele writes, "Taizong was a cultured emperor, who enlightened China and started a new era. Enlightened saints came to the people. At that time the country of Daqin had a great sage, who was called Aluoben. He observed the heavens and carried the true scriptures. By observing the laws of the wind, he quickly passed through difficulties and dangers. In the ninth year of the Zhen Guan period, he arrived in Chang'an." For the Xi'an Stele, I employ the latest edition and English translation of the text by Johan Ferreira. See FERREIRA 2014, 169-170. Here "the ninth year of the Zhen Guan period" indicates 635 AD.

<sup>10</sup> TAKAHASHI in KING, ed. 2018, 629.

The manuscript of *Yishenlun* contains a statement that “from then, when he (Christ) took on the body of wuyin/five aggregates, it has not been more than 641 years 向五荫身，六百四十一年不过。”<sup>11</sup> This statement serves as the basis for most scholars to argue that *Yishenlun* was composed around 641. Several other scholars disagree on this conclusion, arguing instead that there was a mistake in the Christian calendar made by Dionysius Exiguus in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, therefore 638 is probably the year of composition,<sup>12</sup> or that since Syriac authors give different dates for the birth of Christ, we may date the composition of *Yishenlun* to 635/6.<sup>13</sup> Despite the fact that the exact date of composition is still under debate, we can safely conclude that *Yishenlun* was written during the first few years after Aluoben’s arrival in Chang’an.

This manuscript was bought by the Japanese collector Tomioka Kenzô in 1917. After being kept private for so many years, its whereabouts had remained unknown to the academic world, until April 2010 in Osaka, Japan, when the library of the Takeda Science Foundation (武田科學振興財団) named Kyôu shooku (杏雨書屋) held a special exhibition of fifty-eight ancient Dunhuang manuscripts in the “Dunhuang secret collection” (Tonkô hikyû 敦煌秘笈), which included the manuscript of *Yishenlun* unexpectedly.<sup>14</sup>

The text of *Yishenlun* consists of three parts: *Parables, Part II* (*Yu di'er* 喻第二), *On the One Heaven, Part I* (*Yitian lun diyi* 一天论第一), and *The Lord of the Universe’s Discourse on Alms-giving, Part III* (*Shizun bushi lun disan* 世尊布施论第三).<sup>15</sup> Much of the content of *Yishenlun* is biblical and theological, including the creation of the world by God, discussion of monotheism, the feature of the soul, the devils, the Sermon on the Mount, and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In the text, there is a clear employment of biblical material and devotion to the basic Christian doctrines.

### III. *Wuyin* in *Yishenlun* [Discourse on the One God]

*Wuyin* first appears in the section about human constitution:

<sup>11</sup> The English here is my own rendering. “Took on the body of wuyin/five aggregates” seems to indicate the Incarnation.

<sup>12</sup> FERREIRA 2014, 45.

<sup>13</sup> TAKAHASHI in KING, ed. 2018, 629.

<sup>14</sup> NICOLINI-ZANI in TANG & WINKLER, eds., 2016, 16. Now This manuscript is described and reproduced with clear color pictures in the Kyôu shooku (杏雨書屋) catalogue volumes named “Dunhuang secret collection” (Tonkô hikyû 敦煌秘笈).

<sup>15</sup> Curiously in this text, Part II is placed before Part I. This may be a mistake of the scribe.

Line<sup>16</sup> 83-85

魂魄、神识，是五荫所作。亦悉见，亦悉闻，亦言语，亦动。魂魄种姓，无肉眼不见，无肉手不作，无肉脚不行。

Soul and spirit were made of *wuyin*/five aggregates.<sup>17</sup> They know how to see and how to hear. They speak and move. The nature of the soul is like this: when disjoined with the human eyes, it cannot see; disjoined with the human hands, it cannot operate; disjoined with the human feet, it cannot walk.<sup>18</sup>

Line 91-92

此魂魄不得五荫，故不能成。

Without the *wuyin*/five aggregates, the soul itself cannot exist at all.<sup>19</sup>

Line 95-99

譬如说言，魂魄在身上，如地中麦苗在，后生生子。五荫共魂魄，亦言麦苗生子。种子上能生苗，苗子亦各固自然生，不求粪水。若以刈竟麦入窖，即不藉粪水、暖风、土。如魂魄在身，不求觅食饮，亦不须衣服。若天地灭时，劫更生时，魂魄还归五荫身来，自然具足。更不求觅衣食，常住快乐，神通游戏，不切物资身。

As the saying goes: the soul dwells in the body. Another example: in the soil there is wheat which can later produce seeds. The combination of the *wuyin*/five aggregates with the soul is also like wheat producing seeds. A seed can grow into a plant and all plants grow according to their own nature. They demand no fertilizer. You can cut off the wheat and store the grains in the cellar. Without depending on fertilizer, the warm wind can blow. So is like the soul in the body. It does not need to seek for food, nor clothing. When the world starts to perish and the catastrophe comes, then it is the time of rebirth. Then the soul returns to the *wuyin*/five aggregates, naturally being sufficed, needing to seek no food or clothing, happily existing, playing with magic power, being close to no materials, and depending on no flesh.<sup>20</sup>

Line 114-115

共五荫，共魂魄，自一身。

The *wuyin*/five aggregates and the soul form a complete human being.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Here I employ Wang Lanping's annotation of the manuscript. And for the English translation, I rely on Li Tang's work. The annotations and English translations without footnotes referring to Wang or Tang's work are my own renderings of the text.

<sup>17</sup> As will be discussed in the next section, five aggregates is the common English translation for *wuyin*.

<sup>18</sup> WANG 2016, 196. TANG 2002, 161-162.

<sup>19</sup> WANG 2016, 197.

<sup>20</sup> WANG 2016, 197. TANG 2002, 162-163.

<sup>21</sup> WANG 2016, 198.

The passages above indicate that *wuyin* generates the soul and the spirit of a person. And in the following section of this paper, after knowing that *wuyin*, in its original Chinese Buddhist context, includes both the physical and the psychological/spiritual part of a person, a conclusion can be reached safely that, in this text, the human being is made of *wuyin*.

Although it seems sufficient to state that *wuyin* constitutes a person and functions as the basis of soul and spirit, these passages often juxtapose *wuyin* with the soul to illuminate the two different aspects of a person—*wuyin* being the physical and bodily part, and the soul the mental and spiritual part, and to emphasize the relationship between these two different aspects. Both the soul and the body are needed to constitute a fully functional human being.

Assumingly, the author of this text was trying to employ the Buddhist term *wuyin* but also hoping to incorporate and underscore the Christian doctrines about the soul. *Wuyin* alone, as the next section will demonstrate, can denote both the bodily and the spiritual part of a person, but due to the significant position of the soul in Christian theology, it has to be singled out and addressed properly.

*Wuyin* is also used to indicate the humanity of Christ:

Line 274-275

弥师诃于五荫中死。

Mishihe/the Messiah suffered death in the *wuyin*/five aggregates.<sup>22</sup>

Line 284-286

所以弥师诃上悬高，求承实世尊，喻如说书，当向暗处，弥师诃五音[荫]身人世尊许，所以名化。

Therefore Mishihe/the Messiah was hanged, to be declared as the World Honored One. For the Book says, he needed to go to the Sheol. The World Honored One put on the *wuyin*/five aggregates body of Mishihe/the Messiah, in that sense there is a change.

Line 297

觅五荫不见。

(They went into the tomb and) looked for the *wuyin*/five aggregates, but found nothing.

Line 326-328

来向天下，亦作圣化，为我罪业中，于己自由身上受死，五荫三日内从死起。

He came to the world and did the holy work. For our sins, He died voluntarily.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 207.

His *wuyin*/five aggregates were resurrected in three days.<sup>23</sup>

Line 366

向五荫身，六百四十一年不过。

From then, when he (Christ) took on the body of *wuyin*/five aggregates, it has not been more than 641 years.<sup>24</sup>

When referring to the Incarnation and the Passion of Christ, the text most often uses the term *wuyin*. This language of Christ putting on the body of *wuyin*/five aggregates certainly reminds us of Philippians 2:7, whose Syriac Peshitta version translates as “yet emptied he himself, and took the form of a servant, and was made in the form of men.” The plural noun “men” in this verse has its root in Syriac as *anāshā*, which means man, human being, or mortal. Therefore, *wuyin* in this text can be seen as the translation of the Syriac word *anāshā* into Chinese, to indicate the humanity of Christ. The paper will argue later that using *wuyin* to translate the humanity of Christ may be a deliberate choice of the translator, and this translation is in line with the East Syriac theological tradition.

As seen in the earlier analysis, the term *wuyin* has been used in the text to talk about the constitution of a human being. The fact that the text employs the same term to denote both the humanity of ordinary people and the humanity of Christ indicates that we share the same kind of humanity with Christ, which can further serve as an invitation and encouragement for Christians to imitate Christ. This pedagogical aspect of the humanity of Christ will be addressed in section V of this paper.

Before ending this section, two places in the text where the devils are mentioned are worth noticing:

Line 387-389

时恶魔即来，于人上，共作人形，向天下处分。现见于迷惑术中，作无量种罪业，作如此损伤。

Then the devils will come and will take a human form. They can be seen clearly in the world. In their temptations and sorcery, they commit countless sins and cause great destruction.<sup>25</sup>

Line 393-395

亦有无信，向天尊处分者，唯有恶魔鬼等。作人形现者，弥师诃与一神，天分明见。

Those who do not believe and will be judged by the heavenly Lord are the devils. They take the human forms. Mishihe/the Messiah and the One-God can see it

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 214.

clearly in the world.<sup>26</sup>

The mentioning of the devils taking a human form seems to imply in a subtle way a contrast between the human form of the devils, which is fake and deceptive, and the humanity of Christ, which is concrete and substantial.

To summarize, *wuyin* in this text constitutes a person, and indicates the humanity of both ordinary people and Christ, which bears certain pedagogical implications. After examining the connotation of this word in its original Buddhist context, it becomes clear that *wuyin* indicates the full humanity of Christ. And then, in the section about the East Syriac theological tradition, the emphasis on the full humanity of Christ has its significances.

#### IV. *Wuyin* in the Chinese Buddhist Context

When Buddhism arrived China, the term *five skandhas* was translated as *wuyin* 五荫/阴, *wuzhong* 五众, *wuju* 五聚, or *wuyun* 五蕴. “Wu 五” means five, and *yin* 荫/阴, *zhong* 众, *ju* 聚, *yun* 蕴 are all variants that the translators of Buddhist texts employed in the hope to capture the original Sanskrit meaning of *skandha* as heap or aggregate. *Five skandhas*, or to use its English translation, five aggregates, is one of the most common categories in Buddhist literature for enumerating the constituents of the person. The term *wuyin* carries a long history behind it, the detailed account of which is certainly beyond the scope of this short paper. Furthermore, due to the limitedness of historical records, it is not possible to identify the specific Buddhist philosophical schools the Jingjiao missionaries had interacted with, or to pin the Chinese Buddhist traditions that definitely had an influence on the writings of these Jingjiao texts. However, it is possible to discuss the most basic aspects of this term, which are more or less shared by different Buddhist schools, thus making them the doctrines the East Syriac missionaries were most likely to be exposed to when they arrived in China. The five aggregates are:

- 1) *Rūpa: se* 色. Body, form, materiality. It includes all the physical constituents of the person.
- 2) *Vedanā: shou* 受. Feeling, sensation. It includes both sensations arising from the body and mental feelings of happiness, unhappiness, or indifference.
- 3) *Samjñā: xiang* 想. Perception, discrimination, conceptual identification. It is that which processes sensory and mental objects, so as to classify and label them.
- 4) *Samskāra: xing* 行. Formation, volition. It includes a miscellany of phenomena that are both formed and in the process of formation, i.e., the large collection of factors that cannot be conveniently classified with the other four aggregates.

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<sup>26</sup> TANG 2002, 180.

- 5) *Vijñāna*: *shi* 识. Consciousness. Basic awareness of a sensory or mental object and the discrimination of its aspects or parts, which are actually recognized by *saṃjñā*. It is also known as *citta*, the central focus of personality, which can be seen as “mind,” “heart,” or “thought.”<sup>27</sup>

To summarize, 1) is physical, and the other four are mental and spiritual qualities. 2), 3), 4) are associated with mental functions, while 5) represents the faculty or nature of the mind. In Buddhist teaching, a person comes into existence by the contemporary combination of these five aggregates. To be sure, the list of five aggregates only represents one of various possible ways of analyzing the constituents of a person. An alternative analysis sees the individual as comprising twelve spheres: the six senses (five physical senses plus the mind) and the six classes of object of those senses. Or an individual can be made up of eighteen elements: six senses, six classes of sense object, and six classes of consciousness.

None of the five aggregates could be considered permanent or eternal. All are liable to change, transformation, and destruction. Therefore, Buddhist thought suggests that there is no such a thing as a substantive, concrete, or everlasting self, since everything arises from conditions. The sense of self is just a label that one imposes on these physical and mental phenomena after observing their connectedness. This attachment to the self is what Buddhism tries to overcome in order to realize the ultimate enlightenment. Therefore, the notion of *wuyin* is closely related to the foundation of Buddhist teaching.

In the Chinese Buddhist context, the relationship between *wuyin* and the teaching of no-self is not always crystal clear. For example, the eminent Chinese monk Huiyuan 慧远 (334-416) was greatly influenced by a treatise named *San fa du lun* 三法度论, which acknowledges that a person does have a substantive and everlasting self. The major arguments in this treatise for the existence of the self are as follows. First, sentient beings are different from plants because they have feelings, and this fact implies a receptive or sensory function in us (the *vedanā*, *shou* 受 in the five aggregates). Thus, we must assume a self as the receiver of the outside impacts. Secondly, in order for a subject from the past to persist in the present and in the future, cycling through *samsara*, a continuous self is needed. Finally, *nirvana* must be embodied and expressed by a subject, i.e. a self.<sup>28</sup> The introduction of *San fa du lun* to Chinese Buddhism and Huiyuan’s advocacy of its teaching had a huge influence on the Chinese Buddhist doctrines at that time.

<sup>27</sup> For each category, I give the Sanskrit term, the Chinese translation, the English translation, and the general connotations. The sources I have consulted in order to produce this summary are: *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press), 2017, and *Fo guang da cidian* 佛光大辞典, 5th ed. (Taiwan Gaoxiang shi: Fo guang chubanshe), 1989.

<sup>28</sup> LYU 1933, 74.



Huiyuan's example serves as an illustration of the complicated doctrinal history related to the term *wuyin*. However, this complexity does not prevent us from reaching a consensus of the most basic meaning of *wuyin*. From the analysis above, *wuyin* indicates the five constituents of a person. Although the idea of a constant and permanent self is generally refuted by Buddhist teaching, the East Syriac missionaries seem to have taken this term out of its original context, and used it to denote the full humanity of ordinary people and of Christ, since the original meaning of *wuyin* includes both the physical and the mental/spiritual part of a person.

### V. The Humanity of Christ in the East Syriac Tradition

The discussion of the humanity of Christ appears in the writings of the Cappadocian Fathers. Gregory of Nazianzus argues that the Word had to assume a rational human soul and body because it was the human mind that had sinned and thus required being taken up into the Incarnation.<sup>29</sup> However, the theology of the East Syriac tradition should be read and studied in its own terms. Thus, the analysis here will focus on two prominent theologians in the very own tradition of East Syriac Christianity: Theodore of Mopsuestia and Theodoret of Cyrus.

Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428) is widely regarded as the towering intellect of the Antiochene tradition. And he is revered as the Interpreter in the East Syriac tradition. Theodore emphasizes the two distinct natures of Christ. Against Arianism, he asserts that the Son is the true God, consubstantial with the Father. In the face of Apollinarianism, he argues that the 'Man assumed' is a complete man, perfect in everything which belongs to human nature and composed of a mortal body and a rational soul. Theodore argues that Christ assumes the full humanity:

They also object against us that the blessed Simon said: *I will lay down my life for you*. But I think this rather serves us as an argument. For just as he, a man composed of soul and body, said: *I will lay down my life*, so also our Lord (spoke). For it is not the divine Nature speaking about his soul, but the human (nature)...it being evident that a soul is part of a man.<sup>30</sup>

He did not take a body only, but the whole man, composed of a body and of an immortal and rational soul.<sup>31</sup>

These two quotations above clearly indicate that the soul is an essential part of a human being. To deny a human soul to Christ is simply to deny his human nature. Moreover, Theodore emphasizes that this human soul must be rational, in order to refute Apollinaris's teaching that Christ does have a body and a soul, but the *nous* (the intellect, or the mind) is replaced by the Word as divine *Nous*.

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<sup>29</sup> CLAYTON 2007, 228.

<sup>30</sup> NORRIS 1963, 203.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 203.

Then we may ask: why it is so important for Christ to have the full humanity? There are two main arguments Theodore raises to answer this question. To begin with, the impassibility of God needs to be preserved.

Here is yet another testimony—the statement that Jesus ‘grew in age and in wisdom and in favour with God and with men’—(which) the Apollinarians, who deny intellect to the soul, as well as the Eunomians, who in a similar way repudiate the assumption of a soul, are unwilling to investigate and understand. For both groups know that this testimony contradicts their own teaching. For if, as the latter hold, (the Word) did not assume a soul; or if, according to the former, he assumed a soul but not intellect...how did Jesus grow in wisdom? But if he wants to say that the Deity grew in wisdom—not even these men are so impudent as to maintain (this) in their wickedness. Moreover, it is obvious that the body did not grow in wisdom. So then it is manifest that he took a soul endowed with intellect.<sup>32</sup>

The characteristic actions and passions of human nature cannot be predicated of the divine Son, and the Word cannot be the subject of anything physical. Therefore, all these passions must be ascribed to Jesus the man. In order to keep intact the divine nature, the human nature of Christ must be assumed in full, so that all the human actions mentioned in the scripture can be assigned to the humanity of Christ.

Next, there is a strong soteriological basis in Theodore of Mopsuestia’s argument for a perfect humanity free to choose to respond in obedience to the Logos:

It was not, therefore, a body which (the Son) had to assume, but also an immortal and intelligent soul. And it was not the death of the body which it was important to abolish, but indeed (that) of the soul, which is sin; for, *since by a man sin entered the world*, according to the word of the blessed (Paul), *by sin death made its entry*...—it was appropriate that first the sin which was the cause of death be removed, and then death would be abolished with it.<sup>33</sup>

Soul is the seat of sin. Therefore, it is necessary for Christ to take a soul in order to overcome the sin. What is worth noting here is that the assumed soul is not just waiting passively to be redeemed. Rather, the Man whom the divine Son assumed has an active, instrumental part to play in the redemption of mankind. By leading a sinless life and overcoming all the temptations, the assumed Man contributes to the victory of sin and salvation of the mankind.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 205.

Let's move on to Theodoret of Cyrus. While Nestorius was responsible for starting the Christological Controversy, he was exiled to Egypt after the Council of Ephesus (431) and left the theological battlefield. Hence, the Christological Controversy should be better understood as the clash between Cyril of Alexandria and Theodoret of Cyrus, not Nestorius. For it was Theodoret who then became the spokesman of the Antiochene tradition in the years between the third and fourth ecumenical councils, hence his significance.

Theodoret closely follows Theodore in his argument for the full humanity assumed by Christ. There is not so much innovation in his writings, thus a few quotations will suffice:

Again, Apollinaris is taught, together with Arius and Eunomius, how the immutable God the Word was not changed into the *physis* of flesh, but having taken our *ousia* worked our salvation. We have shown through what we have said that the *ousia* of the man was called 'form of a servant', for if the form of God signifies the *ousia* of God—the divine being without shape or form, being simple, non-composite and shapeless—manifestly the form of the servant should be understood reasonably as the *ousia* of the servant. The *ousia* of the servant, that is of humankind, and not only the visible *soma*, but the entire *physis* of the man, is recognized by the thinking person.<sup>34</sup>

On that very account, therefore, I did not say indefinitely what Abraham had, but what he had according to nature (*kata physin*), that is to say, body and reasonable soul.<sup>35</sup>

And yet the Lord Christ is not only human but eternal God, but the divine Apostle names him from the *physis* which he assumed, because it is in this nature that he compares him with Adam. The justification, the struggle, the victory, the death, the resurrection are all of this human *physis*. It is this *physis* which we share with him. In this *physis* they who have exercised themselves beforehand in the citizenship of the kingdom shall reign with him. Of this *physis* I spoke, not dividing the Godhead, but referring what is proper to the humanity.<sup>36</sup>

From these quotations, we can see that Theodoret, following Theodore, also argues for the full humanity, i.e. body united with a rational soul, of Christ. The soteriological significance of the full humanity of Christ is evident here in Theodoret's writing—it is the humanity that progresses and wins the struggle with temptations.

One sentence in the last quotation of Theodoret's writing reads, "It is this *physis* which we share with him." This sentence echoes with what has been discussed in

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<sup>34</sup> CLAYTON 2007, 117.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 254-255.

section III of this paper, i.e. the fact that the text of *Yishenlun* uses *wuyin* to denote both the humanity of ordinary people and of Christ highlights the close relationship between our humanity and that of Christ. That section mentions in passing that our sharing of humanity with Christ in the text of *Yishenlun* serves as an invitation and encouragement for Christians to imitate Christ and may reflect a pedagogical aspect in the East Syriac tradition.

AbouZayd argues for the significant position of the imitation of Christ in the Syriac ascetical tradition. He writes:

In the Syrian Church the imitation of Jesus Christ was the most important inspiration for the eremitic life. A hermit gave up everything to take up the eremitic life because of Christ. The hermit loved God through the love of Jesus for his Father. In Christ the hermit found the perfect fulfillment of his vocation.<sup>37</sup>

The fact that we share the same humanity with Christ is the basis for the imitation of Christ. And the imitative relationship between human beings and God is discussed in detail by Becker:

The earliest Syriac sources attest to an understanding of Christianity as a form of learning. This is apparent explicitly in the imagery that is often employed in the sources, but also implicitly in the understanding of the human being's relationship with God as imitative. Thus, the strong emphasis on the imitation of Christ in some of the earliest Syriac literature, including the famous twin motif in texts such as the *Acts of Thomas*, corresponds with the pedagogical model. Self-identification with the bridegroom, such as we find in the line from Aphrahat's sixth *Demonstration* from the mid-fourth century ("The solitary [*ihīdāyā*] from the bosom of his father gives pleasure to all the solitaries [*ihīdāyē*]"), is analogous to the mimetic understanding of learning common in antiquity.<sup>38</sup>

The imitation of Christ is thus the reflection of the pedagogical aspect within the Syriac theological tradition from the very beginning. And this motif may have found its way into the text of *Yishenlun*.

In short, the full humanity of Christ carries a lot of theological significance. The East Syriac tradition emphasizes on this aspect in order to defend the impassibility of the Divine and to promote the soteriological function of the humanity of Christ.

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<sup>37</sup> ABOUZAYD 1993, 116.

<sup>38</sup> BECKER 2006, 24.

## VI. Theology Translated

By now, scholars have identified one of the Jingjiao Dunhuang texts *Sanwei mengdu zan* 三威蒙度赞 to be a paraphrase of the *Gloria in excelsis Deo*, but the other texts have no known counterparts in Syriac or any other Christian literature. To employ the technical term used in the field of translation studies, we only have the target text but are lacking the source text when studying the text of *Yishenlun*. However, it is quite obvious that the term analyzed in this paper, *wuyin*, aims to translate the humanity of Christ into Chinese, although we cannot be sure what the corresponding term of *wuyin* is in the original Syriac language.

Umberto Eco, in his work entitled *Experiences in Translation*, discusses about what the process of translation truly is:

We decide how to translate, not on the basis of the dictionary, but on the basis of the whole history of two literatures...Therefore translating is not only connected with linguistic competence, but with intertextual, psychological, and narrative competence.

Similarity in meaning can only be established by interpretation, and translation is a special case of interpretation.<sup>39</sup>

Every word bears within itself a long history in its specific cultural environment. When translating, the translator cannot just look up the dictionary and find the equivalence of a word, but the whole contexts behind both the word in the source text and the word in the target text have to be taken into consideration. Therefore, the translation process presupposes the translator's interpretation of the source text, which will surely affect her choice of words, syntax, and genre in translation.

In the case of *wuyin*, the author of this text, having been immersed in the East Syriac tradition for years, was likely to be influenced by the strong emphasis of the full humanity of Christ, and this can be part of the reason why he had chosen *wuyin* to denote the full humanity of Christ.

Eco argues in another book that:

All the above examples tell us that the aim of a translation, more than producing any literal 'equivalence,' is to create the same effect in the mind of the reader (obviously according to the translator's interpretation) as the original text wanted to create. Instead of speaking of equivalence of meaning, we can speak of *functional equivalence*: a good translation must generate the same effect aimed at by the original.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Eco 2015, 13.

<sup>40</sup> Eco 2003, 56.

Translators have to make interpretative hypotheses about the effect programmed by the original text. In the case of *wuyin*, the interpretative lens is the East Syriac theological tradition, and the author hoped to employ the term *wuyin* to convey the full humanity of Christ. It seems that *wuyin* has successfully fulfilled this purpose and created a similar effect in the mind of the reader, since *wuyin* in its original Buddhist context can already be seen as including both the physical part and the spiritual part of a person. Thus, through the term *wuyin*, the native Chinese readers of the text *Yishenlun* will understand that the humanity of Christ is the same as the ordinary people. Considering that *Yishenlun* also talks about the relationship between the body and the soul, the readers will likely to reach the conclusion that Christ, like us, also has a body and a soul.

So far, what is discussed above can be viewed as the gains in this process of translating the full humanity of Christ as *wuyin*. But are there also losses?

In her ethnographical work dealing with how Protestant Christianity translated the Bible in the colonial South India context, Hephzibah Israel summarizes that

One of the most contentious debates on translating the Bible in India was whether to appropriate existing religious terminology or construct new terms. This was particularly challenging in the Indian context where most of the Indian languages already possessed an elaborate religious vocabulary “embedded” in complex “conceptual structures” (Hermans 2002:5). Using existing terminology meant that these terms might point to non-Protestant conceptual structures and Protestant missionaries would not retain full control of signified meanings. However, invented terms could be rendered ineffective by not carrying sufficient Protestant meaning; moreover, it was feared that new terms would remain in competition with more powerful existing terminology to their detriment. What was at stake was the feared “confusion” or “dilution” of Protestant meanings.<sup>41</sup>

The term *wuyin* is exactly what Hephzibah Israel characterizes as “an elaborate religious vocabulary embedded in complex conceptual structures” of the highly sophisticated and nuanced system of Chinese Buddhism. As analyzed in previous sections, the term *wuyin* is inevitably connected with the Buddhist teaching of no-self, and the way *wuyin* analyzes human constitution is quite different from that of East Syriac Christianity. Therefore, the signified meanings of *wuyin* in *Yishenlun* are not entirely controllable and may eventually point the readers to the direction of Buddhism. Some people may then argue for a more literal translation of the humanity of Christ without engaging with the complicated Buddhist worldview, but this more literal translation may fail to capture the completeness of the humanity of Christ compared to *wuyin*. What’s more, the usage of *wuyin* illuminates the interaction between Christianity and Buddhism, and the ways in which these two traditions can have a meaningful conversation on the level of theology and philosophy. In a sense, the translation of the full humanity of Christ

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<sup>41</sup> ISRAEL 2016, 53-54.

into *wuyin* in Chinese adds a philosophical layer to the text, and broadens the ways to interpret *Yishenlun*. Israel argues:

Further, a too literal translation could produce a text that conveyed merely the surface meaning of the words at the expense of all other layers of interpretation, allegorical, moral, and anagogic, which could be read into the biblical text as part of God's divine scheme of communicating to humans: "what is called the most literal version will, in fact, convey frequently the least correct idea of the original" (Bible Translation Society 1840: 64).<sup>42</sup>

In a later chapter of her book, Israel talks about what she thinks is "the fundamental paradox that has fractured the translation and reception of the Protestant sacred among Tamil audiences: how was Protestant Christianity to communicate *difference* while using the *same* language?"<sup>43</sup> In other words, the translators were utilizing linguistic equivalents between languages that inhabit two different religious cultures, how could they manage to do that without pointing to the conceptual equivalence between those religions and to avoid "confusion" or "dilution" of Protestant meanings? Based on her ethnographical research in India, Israel's argument to this question is that "each translation choice has worked to reinforce a narrative of difference between the religions in the Tamil context."<sup>44</sup>

To elaborate her argument, she gives an interesting example of the term *pali*, which has functioned to denote two different conceptions of "sacrifice" in the Protestant and non-Protestant contexts. The fact that the meaning of the term *pali* differed considerably in Hindu and Protestant contexts is actually the main reason why it has been accepted as a Protestant term. In contrast, another term, *yajna*, because of its perceived similarity with the Protestant idea of sacrifice and hence its potential to render the boundaries between the two religions indistinct, was ignored repeatedly.

Whereas *pali* by not referring in its original context to an idea thought of as "Protestant" could be co-opted for its perceived ability to point to a conceptual difference between Protestant and Hindu beliefs. All that was required for *pali* to function as an effective Protestant term was that it signifies a wholly Protestant concept of sacrifice within the Protestant context, which it was able to do only because it did not in any case refer to an identical concept (but only similar practice, if that) in another religious system.<sup>45</sup>

Although we do not have enough historical record or other literary work outside

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 84-85.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 103.

the seven *Jingjiao* Dunhuang texts to help us understand the mindset of those Syriac missionaries who translated their theology into Chinese, inspired by Israel's example of the term *pali* here, I am wondering whether the distinction between *wuyin* and the Syriac term/phrase denoting the humanity of Christ, from which *wuyin* was translated, can be part of the reason why the *Jingjiao* missionaries had chosen this term. On the one hand, by indicating both the bodily and the spiritual part of a person, *wuyin* successfully demonstrates the full humanity of Christ. On the other hand, the connotations of *wuyin* and the teaching of no-self it points to in its original Buddhist context cause no confusion with its function to indicate the humanity of Christ in the Christian context. In other words, *wuyin* refers to different concepts in these two contexts and won't blur the distinction between these two traditions.

## VII. Conclusion

In this paper tries to analyze the Buddhist term *wuyin* used in one of the *Jingjiao* Dunhuang manuscripts named *Yishenlun*. Attention has been paid to both the Chinese Buddhist background of this term and the East Syriac Christian context of *Jingjiao*. Through the application of translation theories, the paper argues that the term *wuyin* effectively conveys the emphasis on the completeness of the humanity of Christ as seen in the East Syriac theological tradition. This stress on the completeness of the humanity of Christ is theologically significant because the East Syriac tradition strongly defends the impassibility of the Divine and promotes the soteriological function of the humanity of Christ.

The concept of *wuyin* represents a common way in Chinese Buddhism to analyze human constitution. The fact that *wuyin* includes both the physical and the spiritual part of a person renders it quite fitting to translate the completeness of the humanity of Christ. Although this is not a literal translation, and the connotations of *wuyin* may inevitably point the native Chinese readers to the direction of Buddhism, this term *wuyin* reveals the interaction between Syriac Christianity and Chinese Buddhism in the text, and adds another philosophical layer to the text. Overall, the argument of this paper should best be seen as speculative and interpretive, since we don't possess enough historical evidence to say for sure about the intention and mentality of these Syriac missionaries when they translated their theology into Chinese. Hence the paper attempts to provide a new perspective as a way forward to analyze and interpret the *Jingjiao* Dunhuang texts.

As George Steiner states in his famous work on language and translation *After Babel*, the process of translation is "the mirror which not only reflects but also generates light."<sup>46</sup> The source text is in many ways enhanced by the act of translation, which broadens and enlarges the original, and helps the original text

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<sup>46</sup> STEINER 1998, 317.



enter into a range of diverse relationships within the new context introduced by the translation process. In a sense, translation gives the original text a new life.

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# INCULTURATION IN THE EAST SYRIAC CHURCH IN CENTRAL ASIA AND CHINA

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## I. Introduction

The word ‘inculturation’ became part of the theological vocabulary rather recently and is used as synonymous with ‘adaptation’, ‘indigenization’ and ‘contextualization’. Anscar J. Chipungco who is regarded as the godfather of ‘inculturation’ in the Catholic circles proposed its definition as follows: “Liturgical inculturation may be described as the process whereby the texts and rites used in worship by the local Church are so inserted in the framework of culture, that they absorb its thought; language and ritual pattern”.<sup>1</sup> It implies the integration of the Church with the language, culture and symbolic system of the country.

In this paper, I shall address the question, how the East Syrian Church, the largest Christian community of the first Millennium, encountered the cultures and religions of Central Asia and China.

For several centuries before Christ, Central Asia and China were in more or less uninterrupted contacts with Persia and this explains the origins of Christianity there at an early period. East Syrian missionaries who were fluent in Middle Persian, evangelized initially the Sogdians who were traders along the Silk road and later the Turks, both the nomadic and settled groups.<sup>2</sup> Available texts and inscriptions attest that Christians of Central Asia used at least six languages: Syriac, Middle Persian, Sogdian, New Persian, Old Uyghur and Öngüt Turkic.<sup>3</sup> However, Syriac seems to have been used as the primary liturgical language, and local languages, (namely Sogdian) were used, perhaps in a limited way, for singing hymns, chanting psalms and reading scriptural lessons.<sup>4</sup>

## II. Possible Phases in Inculturation

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<sup>1</sup> CHIPUNGO 1989, 29. See also, pp. 23ff: “Approaches to Adaptation: Acculturation, Inculturation and Creativity”.

<sup>2</sup> On the origins of Christianity in Central Asia and China: DICKENS 2019; TAKAHASHI 2019; TANG 2004.

<sup>3</sup> DICKENS 2009. 96-98.

<sup>4</sup> See SIMS-WILLIAMS 1992, 49-51; 54.

The Inculturation that had taken place in the East Syrian Church in Central Asia and China shall be studied in the light of the following historical facts. East Syriac Christianity reached different places in Central Asia and China at different times, sprang and disappeared. The extent of implantation was not uniform. In some places it was present as a migrant community from Persia and other places it consisted of Migrants from Sogdia. The size of the communities was different from place to place. Certainly, the converts included Manichaeans, Marcionites as well as other Christian groups from Mesopotamia and Persia, as we learn from the *Book of Governors* by Thomas of Marga.<sup>5</sup> From the third century onwards, Merv, the gateway to Central Asia, was also a centre of Manichaeism. At least since the fourth century, Merv had been an important bishopric in the Church of the East.

The literary or epigraphic evidence as well as archaeological findings attest rather the history of a particular settlement, and not necessarily the history of the East Syriac mission in the region as a whole. Evidences suggest that there was no centralized organization for the communities in the region. This is implied in the inscription of the Xi'an-Fu stele. No metropolitan is named, and the relationship with the "Mother Church" is not highlighted.

Inculturation in Central Asia and China might have taken place at different times and places. Literary evidences are insufficient to draw a clear picture of the inculturation in this region. It is not unlikely that Manichaean texts might have provided examples of literary styles and vocabulary to the first Christian writers in the languages of the region. The liturgical texts that have come down to us are not numerous; no rubrics, commentaries or descriptions have come down to us. However, using the available evidences, literary, epigraphic and epitaphs, we can have a general idea of the extent of inculturation. For the sake of the convenience of the study, I shall propose the following order in the development: (1) Translation of the Scriptures, (2) Translation of the prayers and liturgical texts, (3) Adaptation of Prayers, hymns and liturgical texts, (4) Liturgical customs, (5) Liturgical symbols, vestments, art and architecture, (6) Para-Liturgical rites, and (7) Shamanist practices. However, it is almost certain that translation represents the first phase (1-2) and the next three (3-6) belong to the period when the Church was more or less settled in the region. The last one (7) represents a community

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas of Marga writes on Bishop Shubho Isho ordained by the Patriarch Timothy as a missionary bishop to Central Asia: "He taught and baptized many towns and numerous villages and brought them to the teaching of the divine life. He built churches, and set up in them priests and deacons, and singled out some brethren who were missionaries with him to teach them psalms and canticles of the Spirit. And he himself went deep inland to the farthest end of the East, in the work of great evangelisation and he was doing among pagans, Marcionites, Manichaeans, and other kinds of beliefs and abominations, and he sowed the sublime light of the teaching of the Gospel, the source of life and peace". Thomas of Marga, *Liber Superiorum* (ed. P. BEDJAN), 269-271. Trans. by MINGANA 1925, 13-14.

that was rather free from strict control of the hierarchy, both regional and meta-regional (“Patriarchate of Baghdad”).

### 1. Translation of the Scriptures

The first phase of inculturation represents the translation of the Scriptures, using vocabulary that can convey the message of the Gospel with clarity and that is closer to the original sense of the Biblical themes and concepts. The choice of the religious vocabulary is a difficult task, especially in the religious pluralistic context of Central Asia and China. In both places the situation was not the same. In one place the converts were rather illiterate nomads familiar with Buddhism from India or Manicheanism from Persia or simply the ancestral religions (“Shamanism”). In China, East Syrian Church encountered Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, the religions that were strongly rooted in the country. So, the Church had to adopt different methods.

Before the origin of printing and easy availability of the books of the Bible, Biblical texts were read and preserved primarily in liturgical context, especially in lectionaries. This is true in the case of the Bible in Central Asia. We do not know whether the whole Syriac Bible was translated into Sogdian or Uyghur Turkic. However, we have evidence that portions of the Scripture were read in Sogdian. But perhaps, Uyghur Turkic was also used.<sup>6</sup> Since Psalter had an important place in the East Syriac Daily Offices and Festal Offices, it was certainly translated into the languages of Central Asia. Thus, Psalter fragments in Syriac, Middle Persian, New Persian and Sogdian were discovered in Turfan and Dunhuang.<sup>7</sup>

The use of the Bible in local languages may be attested further in prayers, blessings of wedding, or other texts such as amulets or tomb inscriptions which contain biblical allusions, paraphrases and direct quotations. The use of the Apocrypha is also attested, though in a limited way. Even the non-manuscript materials, like ostrakon and funerary tile show how Bible and its spirit had taken deep roots in the soil of Central Asia, particularly in Sogdian or at least one dialect of the Turkic languages. The so-called “Gospel of Princess Sara”, copied for Princess Sara of Mongolia (sister of Giwargis, King of the Öngüts) attests the fact that Buddhist style of copying Sutras sometimes inspired Christian copyists. It is an example of Chrysography (gold ink on blue paper) inspired by the Buddhist custom of writing sutras in gold ink on blue paper. It is obviously a Gospel book commissioned for personal use.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> DICKENS 2009, 92-120. Here, 111.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-120.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

Apart from the Syriac manuscripts of the Biblical books and lectionaries, Middle Persian, New Persian, Sogdian, and probably Uyghur versions of the scriptures were used by the communities in Central Asia.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.1. *Middle Persian and New Persian Texts*

The translation of the New Testament into Persian could go back to the late 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. Syriac hymns and liturgical texts seem to have been translated into Persian in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and were still in use in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, none of them have survived. An important testimony to Middle Persian Christian literature is the *Škand-guāmnīg Wizār*, a 9<sup>th</sup>-century polemic against Jews and Christians which quotes several Old Testament and New Testament verses in Middle Persian.<sup>10</sup> We have a Middle Persian Psalter from Turfan, the only extant Christian manuscript in that language. The extant fragments contain most of Pss. 94-99; 118; 121-136. The manuscript, probably of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, might have been copied from an original one or two centuries older. It is rather a literal translation of the Peshitta, using many Syriac loan-words.<sup>11</sup>

There is also an interlinear Syriac New Persian Psalter from Turfan containing Pss. 146:5-147:7 (according to the Peshitta numbering, i.e. Ps. 147 in the English Bible). The Syriac lines are followed by a New Persian translation in modified Syriac scripts (with the extra letters used in Christian Sogdian texts).<sup>12</sup> These Psalters were most probably used by the East Syriac monks from Persia in their daily offices.

### 1.2. *Sogdian Texts*<sup>13</sup>

Sogdians were active in translating Syriac texts into their language. However, no Christian Sogdian texts have been discovered in Sogdiana proper,<sup>14</sup> and most of them come from Turfan. Several important Sogdian biblical texts have been found in Turfan.

- (a) Portions of a Gospel lectionary with rubrics in Syriac and Sogdian text in black ink, thus attesting the use of both languages in liturgy. Though the Sogdian text is mainly dependent on Peshitta, there are traces of the influence of Diatessaron and the Old Syriac version of the New Testament.
- (b) Lectionary fragments with alternating Syriac and Sogdian sentences.

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<sup>9</sup> DICKENS 2009.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> For the follower points from (a) to (d), see DICKENS 2009, 106-108.

<sup>14</sup> Sogdia or Sogdiana was an ancient Iranian civilization. The territory included present day Tajikistan and Uzbekistan such as Samarkand, Bukhara, Khujand, Panjikent and Shahrīsabz.

- (c) Fragments of a Sogdian Psalter, translated from Peshitta, in which the first verse of each Psalm is in both Syriac and Sogdian. This manuscript contains a Sogdian version of the Nicean Creed in Sogdian script.
- (d) A fragment of Ps. 33, with first phrase in Greek and continued in Sogdian. The text shows the influence of LXX as well as Peshitta. The translation was probably made in Sogdiana, where Melkites were present.

### 1.3. Uyghur Turkic Texts

Among the Christian Turkic manuscripts discovered in Turfan and Qara Khoto, at least two suggest the use of the Uyghur language in liturgical celebrations.

- (a) We have a prayer booklet written in Syriac and Uyghur scripts, containing a Syriac phrase probably referring to Ps. 72:17.<sup>15</sup>
- (b) A wedding blessing, with a reference to Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Joshua and Samson.<sup>16</sup>

Although among the Turkic manuscripts, there are no biblical texts *per se*, there are texts with biblical allusions and brief quotations.

## 2. Translation of Prayers

The manuscripts fragments of a Sogdian Psalter contain the Sogdian version of the Nicene Creed, written in Sogdian Script. Among the Uyghur Turkic manuscripts discovered from Turfan, we have a wedding blessing with reference to Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Joshua and Samson (Uyghur in Syriac Script).<sup>17</sup> Sims-Williams has pointed out that the wedding hymn is practically identical with the East Syriac version, as published by Paul Bedjan and others.<sup>18</sup>

## 3. Adaptation of Prayers

### 3.1. Chinese Version of the Gloria in Excelsis Deo

The most interesting liturgical text discovered from China will be the so-called *Gloria in Excelsis Deo* and it provides a good example of liturgical adaptation in China. The manuscript was discovered in 1909 in the Cave of No. 17 of the Thousand Buddhas Grottoes in Dunhuang by Paul Pelliot. The credit for identifying it as the Chinese adaptation of the Syriac version of *Gloria in Excelsis* goes to A. Mingana.<sup>19</sup> The Chinese version is generally considered as approximately contemporary with the erection of the Stele of Xi'an, i.e. 781

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<sup>15</sup> DICKENS 2009, 109.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> See Plate 5: Christian Uyghur wedding blessing in Syriac script [T III Kurutka 1857 = U 7264] published in ZIEME 1981.

<sup>18</sup> SIMS-WILLIAMS 1995, 258.

<sup>19</sup> DRAKE 1935.



AD.<sup>20</sup> This is the only text from China, which can be compared to its Syriac original.

In the East Syriac Church, *Gloria* is sung at the end of the morning prayer (*Sapra*).<sup>21</sup> East Syriac version differs from the Byzantine, West Syriac and Latin versions, which represent another redaction. The oldest known form is attested by the *Apostolic Constitutions*.<sup>22</sup> [The Alexandrian version, followed by the West Syrians is attributed to St Athanasius of Alexandria. Dom B. Capelle has done a comparative study of different versions with the *Apostolic Constitutions*<sup>23</sup>]. The East Syrians also made an interpolation inspired by 1Tim. 6:15-16, in the version available to them (“we confess you...”). This interpolation is absent in the Chinese text, suggesting that the Chinese adaptation was made from an older version.

Li Tang has rendered a literal translation of the Chinese title as follows: “The Mighty of Three Receiving Great Praises (or ‘The Three powers receive great praises’)<sup>24</sup>. The hymn consists of 44 lines with seven characters to each line. As the Chinese title is obscure, so the “problem of a literal translation remains.”<sup>25</sup> The Syriac and Greek versions (including *Apostolic Constitutions* VII, 47, 1-3) refer to the Hymn of the Angels is Luke 2:14. Thus in the East it is popularly known under this title. This has been alluded to in the Chinese version (line 2): “The supreme heavens (or many heavens) praise with honour and awe...”). The Chinese version has retained the original ‘tenor’ as a hymn of the glorification of the Holy Trinity, but composed in the form of the Chinese classical poetical style, i.e., *qiyan shi*. The original East Syriac redaction consists of two parts (i). Trinitarian which is composed as an acclamation and (ii). Christological which is a supplication. The two parts are connected with an intermediary verse. The ‘binitarian structure’ is retained in the Chinese version. But the ‘supplication’ of the second part is rendered as an acclamation.

### 3.2. Sogdian Version of the *Gloria in Excelsis Deo*

*Gloria* was translated into Sogdian and the Sogdian text was probably copied in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. This version was reconstructed by Nicholas Sims-Williams from five fragments of the Turfan collection in the Orientabteilung of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin (Preussischer Kulturbesitz) coming from the site of

<sup>20</sup> FOSTER 1930. Foster had compared it with *Te Deum*.

<sup>21</sup> See MATEOS 1959, 77-78. English translation of *Gloria* in MACLEAN 1894, 170-171. In the East Syriac tradition, some of the manuscripts attribute the hymn to Theodore of Mopsuestia. See: MATEOS 1959, 77.

<sup>22</sup> *Apostolic Constitutions* VII, 47, 1-3., which may not be the primitive text, but a re-writing. See METZGER 1987, 336, 113n.

<sup>23</sup> See CAPELLE 1949.

<sup>24</sup> Translation of the Chinese text by Li Tang in TANG (2002), 181-183. See also the Description on pages 114-115.

<sup>25</sup> TANG 2002, 115.

Bulayîq.<sup>26</sup> According to Sims-Williams, the wording of the hymn is practically identical with the East Syriac Version as published by P. Bedjan and others. He adds that the Chinese text (from Dunhuang) is ‘not a strict translation, but a metrical paraphrase whose verbosity may result from the demands of the metre’.<sup>27</sup> He refers to a study in Chinese by Wu Chi-yu (1980) which includes a phrase by phrase comparison between the Chinese and Syriac texts. Sims-Williams pointed out the correspondences between the Chinese and Sogdian Versions. Sometimes Sogdian Translation is remarkably free.

### 3.3. *Praise to the Transfiguration of the Great Holy One* [Chinese]

This is a hymn of acclamation of the Merciful Father, Aluohe.<sup>28</sup> The manuscript is a complete document in 18 lines, and is a free composition in classical metre of ‘Qiyān Poem’ with regular rhythm. Both *Gloria* and *Transfiguration* could be easily chanted. According to Li Tang, this text seems to be a hymn sung by the East Syrian Church on August 6, which is not certain. Generally speaking, the East Syriac hymns are characterized by their Christological orientation. But this is not the case with this hymn, which is rather ‘monotheistic’. Li Tang has pointed out that Chinese scholars Lin Wusu and Reng Xinjiang held that the hymn was copied in the style of *Gloria* and therefore the manuscript was a forgery.<sup>29</sup> But from a liturgical point of view, the hymn represents a tradition of using indigenous literary genres and thus assuring people’s active participation.

There are passages reminiscent of Buddhist texts: “Bright and clear as the Sun and the moon in thy glittering white visage...”<sup>30</sup> The manuscript gives the impression that the hymn was sung before the reading of the scriptures in the following sequence: the Pauline Epistles, Psalms and the Gospels.

### 3.4. *On the Meaning of Worship* [Chinese]

*Book of Jesus the Messiah*, a summary of Christian doctrine, provides examples of inculturation in theology, using Chinese Buddhist vocabulary. Thus, following Buddhist notion of God, the text says: “The most holy one of great wisdom is equal to emptiness. He cannot be grasped” [8:2C].<sup>31</sup> Even the meaning of worship

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<sup>26</sup> SIMS-WILLIAMS 1995.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>28</sup> Trans. By Li Tang in TANG 2002, 202-203.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>31</sup> Line 30-40 in TANG 2002, 158.

is understood in terms of Buddhism. Unlike Greek and Syriac patristic traditions, life after death is understood in terms of *Nirvana* or bliss:<sup>32</sup>

You can only worship in this world, not in the next world. If someone left this world and is gone, he had already sown in this world what he would be richly rewarded. It is difficult to sow in the next world and be richly rewarded. In the next world, only happiness is seen not any one.<sup>33</sup>

However, during our earthly existence, worship is the means to experience the presence of God: “Those who worship the Lord of the Universe are with the father of Mishihe. Heaven will be their eternal dwelling place, as well as a place for longevity and happiness.”<sup>34</sup> According to *Gloria in Excelsis*, those who worship receive the “holy light” and by worship, the devils are destroyed. It is in worship man is seeking ‘His infinite truth’: “His infinite truth eternal, where can be sought?”<sup>35</sup> As God is invisible and formless, one can contemplate only his ‘Pure Virtue’ and His ‘unequal Power’: “Since the beginning none has seen Him Revealed in all, yet His image cannot be formed. On His pure Virtue alone, one should contemplate, His power alone, no equal found.”<sup>36</sup>

According to the *Book of Jesus the Messiah*, the Ascension of the Mishihe took place thirty days after His resurrection and Pentecost (“reception of the Pure Wind”) on the fortieth day.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. Adaptations of Liturgical Practices: Fasting Rules

In the East, fasting is an integral part of the liturgical tradition. Thus, the Eucharistic celebration is preceded by fasting. Monks as well as lay people are obliged to observe the canonical fasts, especially the Great Lent. Dietary rules on canonical fasting include abstaining from meat, fish, egg, milk products as well as oils. As the main staple food of the nomads of Central Asia consisted of milk products and meat, this caused a practical problem. Should they abstain from these items?

Bar Hebraeus (1226-1286) quotes from the correspondence between Abdisho, Metropolitan of Merv and the East Syrian Patriarch John (in the year A.D. 1009). Abdisho reported the conversion of the King of the Keraites with his people.

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<sup>32</sup> *Nirvana* in Sanskrit literally means “blowing out”. *Nirbana* (Pali) is the state of enlightenment, release from the cycle of rebirth.

<sup>33</sup> 8:2 D, Line 8-85 in TANG 2002, 165. This could be an adaptation of the ideas expressed in Mt. 22:30 & Ps 88:10-11.

<sup>34</sup> Line 130-135 in TANG 2002, 177.

<sup>35</sup> TANG 2002, 181-182.

<sup>36</sup> *Gloria*, line 10-15 in TANG 2002, 182.

<sup>37</sup> See line 105-115; 120-125 in TANG 2002, 176-177.

After receiving baptism, the king inquired regarding fasting regulations. We shall quote Bar Hebraeus who recorded the words of Abdisho:

He also made enquiries from me concerning fasting, and said to me, ‘Apart from meat and milk, we have no other food; how could we then fast’; he also told me that the number of those who were converted with him reached two hundred thousand. The Catholicos wrote then to the Metropolitan, and told him to send two persons, a priest and a deacon, with all the requisites of an altar, to go and baptize all those who were converted, and to teach them Christian habits. As to the fast of Lent, they should abstain in it from meat, but they should be given permission to drink milk, as they say, Lent food is not found in their country.<sup>38</sup>

Bar Hebraeus’ possible source of information is the *Kitab al-Mijdal (Book of the Tower)* of Mari Ibn Sulaiman, who wrote in Arabic for a Christian public around 1145-1150 AD, well before the beginning of the Mongol Empire.<sup>39</sup> We shall quote his version, which is earlier than that of Bar Hebraeus’, and differs at several details.

A king from the Turkish kings became Christian with two hundred thousand souls. The cause of this was that he lost his way when he went hunting, and while he was bewildered not knowing what to do, he saw the figure of a man who promised salvation to him. He asked him about his name, and he told him it was Mar Sergius. He intimated him to become Christian, and said to him, ‘close your eyes, and he closed them. When he opened them, he found himself in his camp. He was amazed at this, and made inquiries concerning Christian religion, prayer, and book of canon-laws. He was taught the Lord’s prayer, *Lā kū Mārā*, and *Kaddīshā Alāhā*. The Bishop told also (the Patriarch) that he had written to him on the subject of his going to him, and that he was informed that his people were accustomed to eat only meat and milk. The king had set up a pavilion to take the place of an altar, in which was a cross and a Gospel, and named it after Mar Sergius, and he tethered a mare there, and he takes her milk and lays it on the Gospel and the cross, and recites over it prayers which he has learned, and make the sign of the Cross over it, and he and his people after him take a draught from it. The Metropolitan inquired from (the Patriarch) what was to be done with them as they had no wheat, and the latter answered him to endeavour to find them wheat and wine for Easter; as to abstinence, they should abstain at lent from meat, and be satisfied with milk. If their habit was to take sour milk, they should take sweet milk as a change to their habit.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> MINGANA 1925, 15; See: Bar Hebraeus’ *Chronicle* (ed. LAMY), III, p. 280. WILMSHURST 2016, 398. [I have quoted Mingana’s translation which is better].

<sup>39</sup> ATWOOD 2014, 517. I am grateful to Prof. Pier Giorgio Borbone (Pisa) for bringing my attention to this article and sending me a copy of it.

<sup>40</sup> *Book of the Tower*, “the life of John V” in GISMONDI 1899 (tr.), *Maris Amri et Salibae de patriarchis nestorianorum commentaria*, Vol. I, 100. Cfr. ASSEMANI 1728, *BO.*, IV, 484.

Here sour milk means fermented and thus lightly alcoholic mare's milk or *koumis* (Turkish *qumız* or called *airag*, *esüg* or *chigee* in Mongolian), which was a popular drink. It must have been hard to abstain from it during the Lent.<sup>41</sup>

Both versions give the impression that the newly founded Churches sought the guidance of the Patriarch of Baghdad in some liturgical practices. In certain cases, dispensations were granted. Thus, they were directed to abstain from meat and sour milk. But in the case of the Eucharistic celebration, they were instructed to use wheat bread and wine.

A Syriac document attributed to Philoxenus of Mabbug also speaks of the dietary habits of the Turkic people.<sup>42</sup> According to it, the Lenten diet of the Turkic people included dry meat as well:

In the days of the holy Lent they do not eat fresh and new meat, but meat that is dry like wood; and they fast from evening till evening and they make the wafers of the Holy and Divine Sacrament from bread of pure wheat. They bring from other countries, with great care and diligence, pure flour from pure wheat, and they store it up for the purpose; so also, they fetch from remote regions the raisins from which they make the wine used for the Holy Communion.<sup>43</sup>

This attests that the inculturation was not permitted in the case of the Eucharistic celebration. The author adds that bread was not their staple food: "No bread at all is found in their country, no cornfield, no vineyard, no wine, and no raisins; and all their food consists of meat and milk of sheep; and they have a great quantity of flocks."<sup>44</sup>

In addition to the Eucharist, they remained faithful to the East Syriac liturgical tradition in several respects. Thus, the Syriac document attributed to Philoxenus says: "They do not practice circumcision like pagans, but are baptized like us with holy baptism and the holy chrism"<sup>45</sup> William of Rubruck says that the "Patriarch had sent them from Baghdad a quadrangular skin for an *antimensium*, and it had been anointed with chrism."<sup>46</sup>

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Translation by MINGANA 1925, 16-17. On a discussion on the versions given by Bar Hebraeus and Ibn Sulaiman, see: ATWOOD 2014, 516-517.

<sup>41</sup> See: ATWOOD 2014, 517-518; HALBERTSMA 2008, 31. See also MINGANA 1925, 17. On the preparation of *Koumis*, See Rubruck's description in ROCKHILL 1900 (tr.), 66-67; On the Mongol food customs, see: *ibid.*, 62-70.

<sup>42</sup> Translation by MINGANA 1925, 58-73; see also the description: 49-58. The author claims that the Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch also had some share in the conversion of the Turks and because of the political turmoil, the relationship was interrupted and they came under the 'Nestorian Patriarchate of Seleucia-Ctesiphon'. MINGANA 1925, 66-67.

<sup>43</sup> MINGANA 1925, 69.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>46</sup> RUBRUCK in ROCKHILL 1900 (tr.), 215; MINGANA 1925, 21-22.

## 5. Para-Liturgical Rites

### 5.1. *Blessing of Koumis*

*Koumis* (the fermented milk from a mare) was an alcoholic drink served in banquets of the Mongols and it was considered a sacred beverage.<sup>47</sup> William Rubruck records the ceremonial drinking that he had witnessed in the camp of Batu:

And when they have come together to drink they first sprinkle with liquor the image which is over the master's head, and then the other images in order.<sup>48</sup> Then an attendant goes out to the dwelling with a cup and liquor, and sprinkles three times to the south, each time bending the knee, and that to do reverence to the fire; then to the east, and that to do reverence to the water; to the north they sprinkle for the dead. When the master takes the cup in hand and is about to drink, he first pours a portion on the ground. If he were to drink seated on a horse, he first before he drinks pours little on the neck or the mane of the horse. Then when the attendants are ready with two cups and platters to carry drink to the master and the wife seated near him upon the couch (....) A bench with a skin of milk or some other drink, and with cups, stands in the entry.<sup>49</sup>

The Christian people from abroad (Russian, Greeks and Alans) abstained from this pagan sacred beverage and considered its drink to be apostasy from the Christian faith.<sup>50</sup> For the natives it was difficult to abstain from their preferred beverage for the sake of a new religion. Rubruck records an incident:

On the day of Pentecost (7<sup>th</sup> June 1253) a certain Saracen (Muslim) came to us, and while in conversation with us, we began expounding the faith (.....) he said he wished to be baptized; but while we were making ready to baptize him he suddenly jumped on his horse saying he had to go home to consult with his wife. And the next day talking with us he said he could not possible venture to receive baptism, for he could not drink cosmos. For the Christians of these parts say that no true Christian should drink, but that without this drink it was impossible to live in these deserts. From this opinion I could not possibly turn him.<sup>51</sup>

As the drinking water was scarce, people might have depended on beverages like *koumis* for survival. This seems to be the context in which the East Syrians adapted the ceremonial drinking of *koumis* with a blessing, to give it a Christian touch. In the Shamanistic world of the Mongols, the rulers asked the East Syrian clergy to give a blessing to their favourite drink. Thus, Rubruck writes that he

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<sup>47</sup> On the beverages of the Mongols, see notes in: RUBRUCK in ROCKHILL 1900 (tr.), 62.

<sup>48</sup> On the arrangement of the felt images in a Mongol tent, see: *ibid.*, 58-59.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 60-61. For a summary of the accounts by Rubruck, see: DAUVILLIER 1957.

<sup>50</sup> RUBRUCK in ROCKHILL 1900 (tr.), 87. A synod of the Russian Church held in 1274, discussed the question of the food. Cfr. ATWOOD 2014, 519.

<sup>51</sup> RUBRUCK in ROCKHILL 1900 (tr.), 90-91.

was asked by the Mongol commander Sartak to give a blessing: “He caused us to sit down and drink of his milk, and after a while he besought us to say a blessing for him, which we did.”<sup>52</sup>

### 5.2. *Ceremonial Drinking*

On important feast days, blessing of *koumis* took place in the Mongol court. On the feast of Epiphany (January 6) the priests went to the Mongol court in a procession with cross, censer and the Gospel:

Now on that day the Mongu Chan had had a feast, and it is his custom on such days as his diviners tell him are holy, or the Nestorian priests say for some reason are sacred, for him to hold court, and on such days first come the Christian priests with their apparel, and they pray for him and bless his cup. When they had left, the Saracen priests came do likewise. After them came the priests of the idols, doing the same thing.<sup>53</sup>

But the Turco-Mongol believers of the East Syriac Church willingly participated in its drinking with its ritual character.

We are told that at the beginning of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the first Christian prince of the Keraites kept a special mare among his horses, and its milk was placed in front of the cross and the Holy Scriptures; special prayers were said over it and placed and the prince and his companions drank it together (*quoted above*).<sup>54</sup>

According to Rubruck, *Koumis* was served in the churches as well. He records one such episode: “[Mongke Khan] entered the church... And they brought him a gilded couch, on which he sat beside his (Christian) lady; facing the altar...”<sup>55</sup> Then when the Khan had left, the lady distributed gifts to all those who were present and there was a solemn blessing of the *koumis* followed by the usual feast:

Then the drink was brought, rice mead and red wine... and cosmos (*koumis*). Then the lady, holding a full cup in her hands, knelt and asked a blessing, and the priests all sang with a loud voice, and she drank it all. Likewise, I and my companion had to sing when she wanted to drink another time. When they were all nearly drunk, food was brought consisting of mutton, which was at once devoured, and after that large fish which are called carp, but without salt or bread, of these I ate. And so they passed the day till evening. And when the lady was already tipsy, she got on her cart, the priests singing and howling, and she went away. The next Sunday, when we read ‘*Nuptie facte sunt in Chana*’, came the daughter of the Chan, whose mother was a Christian, and she did likewise, though

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>54</sup> GISMONDI 1899, 113/100, quoted by HAGE (1988), 36. See also: MINGANA, 16-17; ATWOOD 2014, 517.

<sup>55</sup> RUBRUCK in ROCKHILL 1900 (tr.), 185.

with not so much ceremony, for she made no presents but only gave the priests to drink till they were drunk, and also parches millet to eat.<sup>56</sup>

On feast days *koumis* was drunk with the accompaniment of music and dance.<sup>57</sup> Apparently, the priests sung some Syriac hymns ('the priests singing and howling').

In one occasion it is said that in the blessing of the *koumis*, the Khan himself put the incense: "The Nestorian priests carried incense to him (the Khan) and he put it in the censer and they incensed him. They then chanted, blessing his drink; and after them the monk said his benison, and finally we had to say ours."<sup>58</sup>

As we have seen above, at the ceremonial drinking, *koumis* was sprinkled on the felt idols in the tents. According to Rubruck, the East Syrian priests also did it. Thus, on the feast of the Lord's Ascension he witnessed it in the court of Mongke Khan: "... and I noticed that when he (the Khan) was about to drink, they sprinkled cross on his left idols. Then I said to the monk: 'what is there in common between Christ and Belial? What share has our cross with these idols?'"<sup>59</sup>

### 5.3. *Spring Festival*

On the Spring festival, there was a blessing of the herds, which had a liturgical character:

On the ninth day of the month of May, they get together all the white horses of the herds, and consecrated them. And the Christian priests are obliged to come to this with their censer. Then they sprinkle new *cosmos* on the ground and hold a great feast on that day, for they consider that they then first drink new *cosmos* just as in some places among us is done with new wine.<sup>60</sup>

### 5.4. *Holy Week and the Blessing of Bread*

In the Holy Week, blessed bread was presented to the Khan to honour him: "The priests had brought two little loaves of blessed bread and fruit in a platter, which they presented to him, after saying a grace. And a butler took it to him where he was seated on a right high and raised place; and he forthwith began to eat one of the loaves, and the other he sent to his son and to one of his younger brothers."<sup>61</sup>

In the Mongol world such a gift was of great significance. First, wheat bread was not their usual staple food and was made from flour coming from elsewhere.

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<sup>56</sup> RUBRUCK in ROCKHILL 1900 (tr.), 186. Cfr. HAGE 1988, 36.

<sup>57</sup> RUBRUCK in ROCKHILL 1900 (tr.), 62-64.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 222.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 241-242.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 212.



There was certainly a solemn celebration of the Eucharist on Easter in which the Khan's Christian wife and other Christian members of the imperial court receive holy Communion. The East Syrian clergy certainly knew that without presenting the "blessed bread" to the Khan, celebration of the Eucharist can incite his displeasure.

### 5.5. *Prayers for Blessing*

The East Syrian liturgical manuscripts have preserved patterns of the prayers used on such occasions. Thus, in a manuscript of the Cambridge University Library we find two such prayers:<sup>62</sup>

*Prayer on wine:* Celestial drink, drawn from the blessed grape! Bless, O Lord, this wine and infuse it with the favour of Your Grace, so it may bring joy to the hearts of those who drink it and bring light to the intelligence, so that by savouring the wine drawn from the grape they might bless you for the grace you lavished on them, now and [forever], Amen.

*Another [prayer on wine]:* O bridegroom, who was invited to your servants' wedding banquet, and who by a mysterious sign of your benevolence have turned water into fine, scented wine, a beverage that caused wonder and admiration in those who tasted it, may your blessing persist on this wine, so that all those drink of it may obtain joy from it, to take part in the joy and glorify your great and holy name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, forever [and ever], Amen.

It is not at all evident that these prayers were used by the East Syrian clergy in Mongolia. However, we can assume that the blessing said by the clergy of the Mongol court must have been similar to them as the East Syrians usually had a preference for liturgical uniformity. However, we have an example of the East Syrian Church adapting itself to the culture of the nomadic world so that the Turco-Mongol believers could continue to retain their age long customs. In their world, *koumis* was drunk in a semi-ritualistic way.<sup>63</sup> The East Syrians willingly participated in its drinking with its ritual character. The willingness to adapt to their culture might be the reason for the relative success of the East Syrian mission in that part of the world.

### 5.6. *A Ritual for Healing*

Apparently, the East Syrian Church adapted some sacramental or liturgical rites in the Turco-Mongol context. Rubruck narrates the healing ritual performed for Lady Cota, wife of Mongke Khan, who was sick "even unto death" and the "sorcerers of the idolaters could do nothing to drive it out". Mongke sent to an East Syrian monk who rushed to the tent of the lady. The monk asked William

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<sup>62</sup> MS Cambridge University Library, Add.1988, f. 156r-v, cited in PELLIOU 1973, 155. I am grateful to Prof. Pier Giorgio Borbone for bringing these prayers to my attention and sending me a copy.

<sup>63</sup> RUBRUCK in ROCKHILL 1900 (tr.), 62-63.

and other priests to “keep vigil with him that night in the oratory.”<sup>64</sup> The monk had a certain root called *rhubarb* obviously a medicinal plant used among the Mongols. He chopped it up till it was nearly powder and put it in water, with a cross which he had, on which was a raised image of the Saviour (a crucifix?). The monk claimed that he could find out whether the person will recover or not. If the mixture stuck on the sick person’s breast, as if glued there, it indicates that he will recover; if not it will not stick. Rubruck writes that it was the monk’s custom to give this bitter drink to all sick persons which stirred their bowels and the people regarded it as something miraculous. They went to the tent of the lady with a cross. Rubruck continues: “When we went in, she got up from her couch, worshiped the cross, put it reverently beside her on a silk cloth, drank some holy water and rhubarb and washed her breast”.<sup>65</sup> William was asked “to read the Gospel over her” and he read the passion of the Lord according to St John. Finally, she revived and felt better.<sup>66</sup>

Unlike the usual Christian tradition of anointing the sick with blessed olive oil, an indigenous ritual of healing was followed by the East Syrian priests of the Mongol court. It consisted of giving a mixture of local medicinal plant and water to drink, applying it on the breast, and a reading of the Gospel was read over the patient. Probably the priests were not familiar with the East Syrian practice of the anointing of the sick.

## **6. Cross in the World of Religious Pluralism and Shamanism**

Christianity was less popular among the Chinese people obviously because of the presence of Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, all having well established spiritual and philosophical traditions. But it found converts among the Turco-Mongol population, where religious life was deeply rooted in Shamanism. In the world of Shamanism all human life and actions were dominated by the fear of the powerful demons and evil spirits in daily life.<sup>67</sup> There all the religious interest was directed to one problem: to cope with all the concerns of this life on earth, without clear picture of the world where man enters after death.<sup>68</sup>

In the Shamanist world, people could speak about ‘eternal world’, but without having any precise idea. Sometime, eternal heaven was seen as a personal deity and in different tribes, different names were used, for this deity remained in immense remoteness. People did not produce pictures of this deity, although they had felt images or idols of various minor deities.<sup>69</sup> This might have left its traces on their liturgical life: they had a theology of ‘unspecified’ or ‘unknown’ deity,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 193.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 193-194.

<sup>67</sup> HAGE 1988, 29.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid. See also: GILMAN-KLIMKEIT 1999, 216-17.

with no icons or pictures, and prayers giving emphasis on the well-being in earthly life. The popularity of the lotus-cross symbol shall be understood in this context. Apparently, lotus-cross symbolism had its origin among the Turco-Mongol tribes who were formerly Buddhists and then converted to Christianity. Use of cross tattoo on forehead or other parts of body also suggests a Shamanist background. The baptism of Mongol princes as infants by their mothers also might have intention of being protected from evil spirits.

Turco-Mongol people did not have much difficulty to embrace new religions coming from Persia or India.<sup>70</sup> This explains the reason for the tolerance of all religions by the Mongol rulers.<sup>71</sup> In a personal interview, Mongke Khan confided to Rubruck on his own faith: “We... believe there is only one God...but as God gives us the different fingers of the hand, so he gives to men diverse ways.... God gave you the Scriptures, and you do not keep them; he gives us diviners [shamans]; we do what they tell us, and we live in peace.”<sup>72</sup> Thus as Hage noted, “Christian faith and Shamanism were combined into a new unity, into a useful co-existence.”<sup>73</sup> Lotus-cross is the symbol of this co-existence.

Cross was used as amulet as well as a distinctive sign of Christian tombs. The use of the cross as an amulet is attested as early as early the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The history of Theophylact Simocata (c.630) relates that following the advice of the Christians, Central Asian Turks tattooed the foreheads of their children with a cross in order to avoid plague. In 591, when Romans captured these Turks, they found them with this cross.<sup>74</sup>

The details of the cross symbol are not the same everywhere, suggesting various influences.<sup>75</sup> However, generally speaking the plain (“aniconic”) cross is attested in China and Central Asia. The plain crosses ‘are the only images of Christ in China of the Mongolian Yuan dynasty’.<sup>76</sup> Iconic depictions of angels do not occur among the Öngüt East Syriac Christians. In fact, no human features are found on the depictions in Inner Mongolia and the only live creatures are limited to a single pair of birds.<sup>77</sup> The depictions of birds, flowers and vines have striking resemblance with Islamic art.

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<sup>70</sup> HAGE 1988, 30.

<sup>71</sup> MOFFETT 1998, 409-414.

<sup>72</sup> RUBRUCK in ROCKHILL 1900 (tr.), 235f.

<sup>73</sup> HAGE 1988, 34.

<sup>74</sup> WHITBY 1986 (tr.), *The History of Theophylact Simocata*, 146-147, quoted in GILMAN-KLIMKEIT 1999, 217. See also MINGANA 1925, 11-12.

<sup>75</sup> See DAUVILLIER 1983.

<sup>76</sup> MALEK 2002a, 36-37.

<sup>77</sup> HALBERTSMA 2008, 233.

### 6.1. *In China proper: Cross on Tomb stones*

The East Syrian grave stones discovered in Quanzhou (China) can be divided into steles, probably erected vertically at the grave, and elongated stones in the shape of sarcophagi, which were placed horizontally over the grave. In both types, cross is often depicted as rising from lotus flowers and sometimes shielded by a parasol. The steles frequently depict *apsaras* winged angels and stylized clouds and waves.<sup>78</sup> Decorations on the sarcophagi-shaped stones include floral and vine motifs and abstract pattern, also attested in Mesopotamia and Tur Abdin. The organization and shape strongly remind of stones used for Muslim graves.<sup>79</sup> It is not unlikely that they were modeled on patterns of rather Syriac/Mesopotamian origin. The inscriptions on the East Syriac grave stones are most diverse, featuring Chinese, Syriac, Turkic and Phags-pa script.<sup>80</sup> According to Ken Perry, “much of the iconography of the Quanzhou tombstones appears to be Buddhist in inspiration, but Chinese in orientation.”<sup>81</sup>

*Lotus* is one of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism. Thanks to the Buddhist influence, the lotus is of unique importance in Chinese folklore and symbolism. It is the symbol of purity; inwardly empty, yet outwardly upright and fragrant. The words for lotus in Chinese have the same meanings as to: bind, connect (in marriage) one after the other, uninterrupted, to love and modesty.

*Parasol* is a symbol of high rank and royalty. It is also one of the eight auspicious symbols of Buddhism. Thus, in Buddhist art a parasol is often depicted over the head of Buddha or Bodhisatvas.

*Clouds* are symbols of celestial mobility, because many gods and immortals used clouds as vehicle on which they travel. On the other hand, the imagery of cloud has biblical foundation. On Ancient Chinese coins or charms, ‘cloud’ is the symbol of rain water in the sky and thus one of the five elements (metal, wood, water, fire and earth). Clouds also symbolize good fortune and happiness, especially when they have more than one colour.

Thus, Buddhist lotus flowers and swastikas or Daoist and Buddhist clouds found place in cross depictions in China, as they were the most popular religious symbols. According to Klimkeit, these represent an “early spontaneous attempt to indigenize Christianity in China”.<sup>82</sup> Egami and Parry also regarded the use of lotus as the result of a Buddhist influence.<sup>83</sup>

### 6.2. *In Inner Mongolia*

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 59-60.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 58-59.

<sup>80</sup> *Phags-pa* script was invented by a Tibetan Monk for Kublai Khan to write the Mongol language.

<sup>81</sup> EGAMI 2000. PARRY 2006, 332.

<sup>82</sup> KLIMKEIT 1993, 478.

<sup>83</sup> PARRY 2006, 332.

The majority of the East Syriac Christians in inner Mongolia were of Öngüt or Uyghur, i.e. Turkic descent, rather than of Mongol or Han-Chinese origin. Halbertsma points out four “dimensions of Nestorian culture” in inner Mongolia:<sup>84</sup>

- (i) These people practiced a religion with very distinct characteristics. These characteristics were expressed in, among many other ways, language and script, funerary customs and the use of and depiction of religious symbols such as the cross in a variety of forms.
- (ii) Geographical position: the Öngüt territory was situated between China and the nomadic steppe. Isolation from Baghdad exposed the East Syrians of this region to foreign influences.<sup>85</sup>
- (iii) Their ethnicity: They were Öngüt and Uyghur, that is, of Turkic origin, rather than Mongol or Chinese origin. Though acquainted with the Syriac, Mongol and Chinese languages, they used mainly Turkic dialects.<sup>86</sup>
- (iv) Political realities: The East Syrians who participated in the Yuan administration were exposed to the bureaucracy with Mongol and strong Chinese characteristics.

The inscriptions, dating systems and the depictions on East Syrian grave stones can be understood as expressions of these four dimensions. Majority of the tomb inscriptions are in Uyghur Turkic, often written in Syriac alphabets. Their religious identity found expression in Syriac script and the use of the cross.

In Inner Mongolia, Cross, the sign of glorified Christ, was regarded at a later stage as an amulet and magical symbol.<sup>87</sup> Most of the cross depictions are found on grave material, with striking differences in style. The vast majority of the cross depictions are of the ‘Maltese’ or the Greek type, inscribed on stone. A brick with a cross also has been discovered. As in China, the crosses found in inner Mongolia, especially in Olon Sume (Öngüt Capital), are depicted above a lotus flower.<sup>88</sup> The depiction of a cross rising from a lotus shielded by a parasol-shaped object is found on a grave stone from Mukhor Soborghan.<sup>89</sup> Similar depictions of the parasol shielding the cross are also found in Quanzhou.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> For the following four points, see HALBERTSMA 2008, 219-245.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 220.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 235; see 235-240. On the East Syrian remains, grave sites and grave material from inner Mongolia, see 135-158; 159-217. Also see the photos.

<sup>88</sup> For lotus descriptions in Quanzhou, see the table: XIE 2006.

<sup>89</sup> See the Rubbing in HALBERTSMA 2008, Appendix 5-5.

<sup>90</sup> See PARRY 2006, Fig. 11-12.

Use of Daoist and other Buddhist or Chinese symbols in cross depictions such as the image of the hare and rooster in the Moon and Sun on the trilingual stele and the depiction of highly stylized clouds is also attested.<sup>91</sup> Gradual development led to a plain cross depicted in an ogival frame, which according to Egami, can be characterized as the late eastern Yuan dynasty version.<sup>92</sup> Similar outlines are frequently found in Islamic graves. Enoki has suggested an Islamic influence on this style. However, Enoki points out that such frames were used in Chinese Buddhist art before the advent of Islam in Dunhuang.<sup>93</sup> Halbertsma also suggests Islamic influence in the ogival and lantern window frames on the East Syrian grave material.<sup>94</sup> Thus, we can note both Chinese and Islamic influences.

All major East Syrian graves, with a few exceptions in inner Mongolia, feature horizontal grave stones. Cross on the stones are diverse in style and frequently depicted above lotus flower. In a number of cases, the horizontal stones are placed in the East west direction, a custom followed in the East.<sup>95</sup> Chinese elements are incorporated into the East Syrian burial customs. Thus, Chinese style tomb sculptures and turtle bases were found in Olon Sume (Öngüt Capital).

### 6.3. *In Central Asia*

Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a large number of tomb stones with cross were found in the area of Semirechye, south of Lake Balkash (Modern Kazakhstan). In two graveyards more than 600 tomb stones with inscriptions in Syriac and Turkic written with Syriac letters have been found. One-third of the tombstones have dates inscribed on them. They are dated using the Seleucid calendar as well as Turkic/Chinese cycle of 12-animal years. The oldest date found on the tombstone is 825 AD and the latest is AD 1367/68.

Sepulchral art also comes under this category. The first example of Sogdian Christian Sepulchral art belongs to the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the gravestone of one 'Nestorian Exegete dated 1301/1302, has a cross on a lotus flower, flanked by two angels, in long flowing Chinese appearance. The flower is based on an altar, reminiscent of Zoroastrian altar.<sup>96</sup>

The largest grave stone found hitherto is dated AD 1367-68, which commemorates "the death of a blessed lady Constantina".<sup>97</sup> The very well

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<sup>91</sup> HALBERTSMA 2008, 238.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 230, cf. EGAMI 2006, 75.

<sup>93</sup> See ENOKI 1964, 50, n. 23.

<sup>94</sup> HALBERTSMA 2008, 239-40.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>96</sup> See Plate 31 in GILMAN-KLIMKEIT 1999; cf. KLEIN 1994.

<sup>97</sup> See Plate 32, in GILMAN-KLIMKEIT 1999.

executed inscription is surrounded by ornamental border and crowned by a Nestorian Cross.<sup>98</sup>

#### 6.4. *Amulet Cross*

Several amulets combining the symbol of the cross with Buddhist and Shamanist emblems like that of lotus and the swastikas etc. were found in Ordos area.<sup>99</sup> Such amulets must have been used by people of various Turkic and Mongol tribes, even if they had not been converted to Christianity. The magical powers ascribed to the cross would have enabled the incorporation of this sign into the religious symbolism employed to ward off worldly dangers and enhance the positive powers in a life constantly endangered by incalculable outward events.<sup>100</sup> As we have seen above, Rubruck speaks of the use of the cross tattooed on the hand among the Uyghurs.<sup>101</sup>

Likewise, we have also noticed that that following the advice of the Christians, Central Asian Turks tattooed the foreheads of their children with cross in order to avoid plague. In 591, when Romans captured these Turks, they found them with this cross.<sup>102</sup>

Shamanist practices were popular among the nomadic people. It is unlikely they disappeared completely with the conversion to East Syriac Christianity.<sup>103</sup> Some of the Christian symbols and practices might have been understood in terms of the Shamanist practices<sup>104</sup>.

Cross was the most popular Christian symbol among the Christians of Central Asia and China. William of Rubruck had witnessed the veneration of the cross by the baptized members of the Mongol court. Accompanied by a priest, he called on the Khan's son: "[A]s soon as he saw us coming he got up from the couch on which he was seated, and prostrated himself to the ground striking the ground with his forehead, and worshipping the cross. Then getting up he had it placed on the high in the most honoured place beside him."<sup>105</sup> Rubruck visited the Khan's second wife who was very ill. She also prostrated on the ground, "though she was so feeble she could scarcely stand on her feet, to prostrate herself three times, worshipping the cross facing the east in Christian fashion".<sup>106</sup> When Rubruck

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<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>99</sup> See the pattern given in GILMAN-KLIMKEIT 1999, Plate 33, and p. 230f. Also see KLIMKEIT 1979, 99-116; MOULE 1931, 78-86 (*non vidi*).

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 230.

<sup>101</sup> DAWSON 1955, 137.

<sup>102</sup> WHITBY 1986 (tr.), 146-147; GILMAN-KLIMKEIT 1999, 217.

<sup>103</sup> GILMAN-KLIMKEIT 1999, 217.

<sup>104</sup> DAUVILLIER 1956 gives a useful survey of the liturgical practices.

<sup>105</sup> RUBRUCK in ROCKHILL 1900 (tr.), 189.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

visited other ladies of the court, they also worshipped the cross in the same manner.

### 6.5. *Tent Chapels*

Clergy with tent chapels accompanied the Mongol camps. Dokuz Khatun, the East Syriac queen of Hulagu, almost always travelled with a portable tent chapel on an accompanying wagon.<sup>107</sup> This was certainly an adaptation of the Nomadic portable shrine, which was little more than a tattered felt tent mounted on a cart and pulled by an ox or camel from one Mongol camp to another and from one site to another. J. Weatherhead has observed that the importance of a nomadic shrine to the people of the steppe far exceeds its humble and worn appearance.<sup>108</sup> Images of various deities and spirits were arranged according to their ranks and importance in specific places. Among the Christians, the images were apparently replaced with the cross.

### **Conclusion**

As Prof. Wolfgang Hage has observed,<sup>109</sup> the ‘accommodation’ or ‘inculturation’ in Central Asia (and China) was not the result of an intended missionary method, that is planned, experimented and executed. In fact, such conscious efforts of an accommodation were tried by the Jesuits missionaries in China in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. We do not know any particular individual or group (like a synod or a church organization) made any prior discussions. Most of the practices seem to have been brought into the Church by the converts from the Turco-Mongol people. Lack of continuous links with the Mother Church in Baghdad, largely left the Christians of Central Asia to continue to follow the ‘Shamanist’ practices to which their forefathers as well as neighbours were used to.

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<sup>107</sup> MOFFETT 1998, 422.

<sup>108</sup> WEATHERHEAD 2010, 197.

<sup>109</sup> See: HAGE 1988, 10-11.



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